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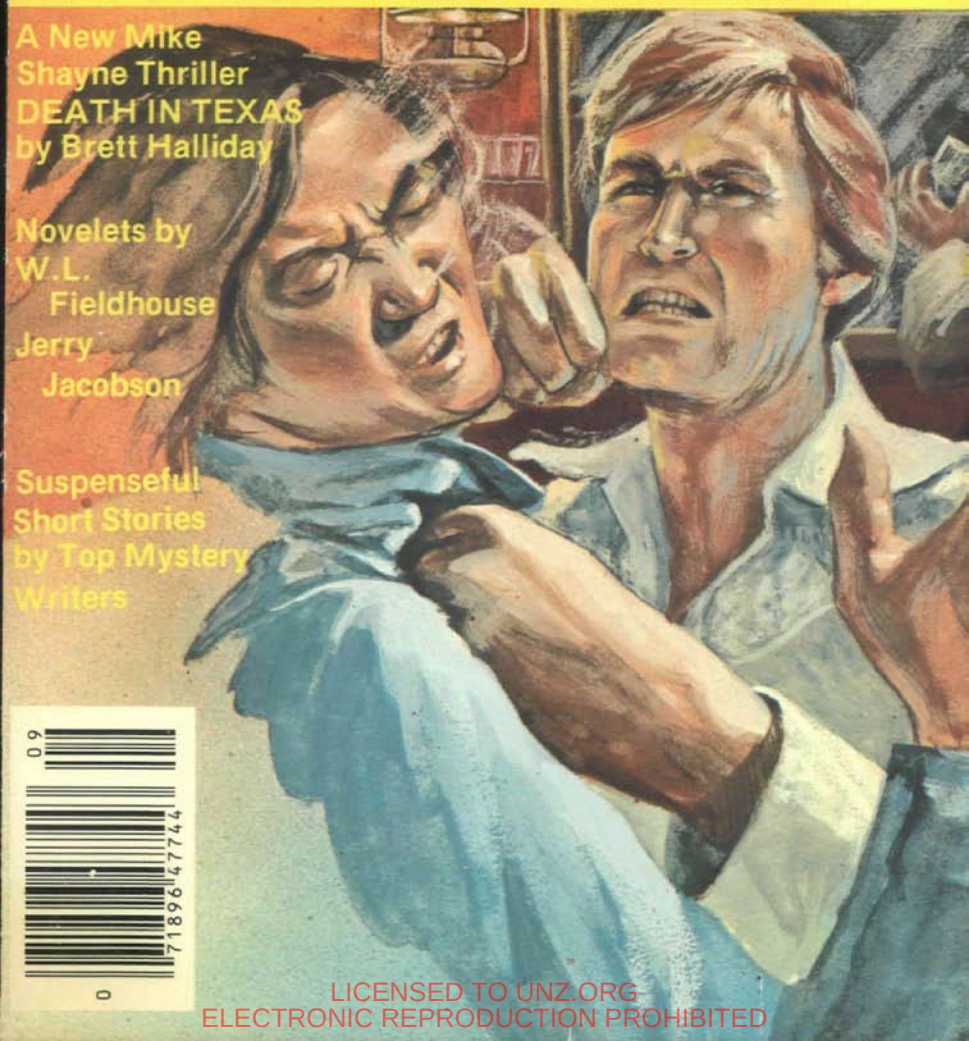

A New Mike Shayne Thriller
DEATH IN TEXAS
by Brett Halliday

Novelets by
W.L. Fieldhouse
Jerry Jacobson

Suspenseful Short Stories by Top Mystery Writers

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WHO IS THIS FEARLESS MAN WHO RISKS HIS LIFE AT EVERY TURN TO THWART JAP ATTEMPTS AT SABOTAGE?
THE MASKED MARVEL
WILLIAM FORREST · LOUISE CURRIE
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A REPUBLIC SERIAL IN 12 CHAPTERS

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DEATH IN TEXAS

by Brett Halliday

Corpus Christi was a lot like Miami in many ways. One of the unfortunate ways was that people were murdered. Mike Shayne didn't like it one bit — especially when the killers and him *targeted as one of their victims!* *4*

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Texas was a lot like Miami. It was full of sound and fury, death and destruction. Mike Shayne felt right at home. It was one of the worst feelings he'd ever had!

Death In Texas

by BRETT HALLIDAY

MICHAEL SHAYNE WAS JUST STEPPING OUT OF THE BUILDING on Flagler Street where his office was located, when a rough hand suddenly grabbed his arm in an iron grip and spun him around. "Shayne, you goddam shamus!" someone roared, and then Shayne saw a big fist coming right at his face.

He ducked, letting his reflexes take over. The punch sailed by harmlessly, and Shayne stepped in closer to the man who had thrown it. He hooked a short, vicious left to the man's unprotected stomach, followed with a devastating right cross that lifted the attacker off his feet and sent him sprawling on the sidewalk.

The man looked up at Shayne and rubbed a jaw that was going to be plenty sore, as bystanders hurried to get out of the way. Shayne's pulse was pounding, pumping adrenalin through him in preparation for the fight to continue. But it was evident from the grin that broke out on the other man's face that the fight was over.

"Damn, you can still hit!" the man said with a rueful chuckle. "Remember that night in Tampico when those merchant marine boys got into a brawl and you pitched in to help them out? You really cleared the decks in *that* bar, fella."

Shayne's lean face was a study in consternation now. Of all the people who might attack him in downtown Miami, Shayne would never have expected this one.

He took a deep breath. "Lomack, you're as crazy as you ever were," he said. "I'll bet they still call you Mad Jack, don't they?"

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The man grinned even wider and held out a hand for Shayne to take. As the big detective helped his former assailant up, the man said, "Hell, yeah, they still call me Mad Jack. Only it's behind my back now." His voice dropped to a mock whisper. "Seems they're afraid of the big boss, afraid I might fire 'em."

The man started dusting his expensive suit off, and Shayne said, "The last I heard of you, you were still in Texas. What are you doing here?"

"What, can't I come see an old friend? After all, you're the famous private detective, Mike Shayne, and I knew you when you were still roughnecking in the oil fields."

"That was a long time ago," Shayne said, "and I knew you when you were doing the same thing. But now you're Mad Jack Lomack, the millionaire wildcatter."

"Yeah, things change for all of us, don't they, Mike?"

They sure as hell did, Shayne thought as he looked at this man who had been one of his closest friends, a lot of years back and a lot of miles away. Lomack still looked about the same, allowing for the passage of time. He was a few inches shorter than Shayne, thick-waisted and broad-shouldered. The closely-cropped beard was still a thick, luxurious brown, and the hair was the same, though there was a little less of it now. Lomack was wearing more expensive clothes now, too. He looked prosperous, which he had never been in the old days. The oil business had obviously been good to him.

"We really raised some hell in our time, though, didn't we?" Lomack went on. "Good times, good times. And it's really good to see you again, Mike." He massaged his jaw again and added, "I just wish I hadn't decided to see if you're still as quick as you used to be. You are."

"I've slowed down some. What do you say to a drink?"

Lomack clapped Shayne on the back and laughed. "I say what took you so long to ask? Is there a good place around here?"

"I was just on my way," Shayne said. "Come on."

IT WAS LATE AFTERNOON, AND SHAYNE HAD JUST LEFT THE office for the day when Lomack made his unexpected appearance. Lucy Hamilton, the big redhead's beautiful secretary, was still upstairs, finishing up the day's paperwork. Shayne was supposed to meet her for dinner later on. He hoped Lomack would be able to join them, and said as much to the oilman.

"Well, I'd like to, Mike," Lomack said, "but to tell you the truth,

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this isn't just a social visit. I've got a problem I'm hoping you can help me with."

Shayne had figured as much. They had reached a nice little cocktail lounge a couple of blocks away from the office, and as he opened the door, Shayne said, "You can tell me all about it over that drink, Jack."

"You still drinking Martell, ice water on the side? It used to amaze me how you could come up with cognac in those jerkwater Mexican towns a hundred miles from nowhere!"

As they settled into a booth, Shayne hoped that Lomack's problem wasn't a major one. The two of them had shared drinks and brawls and hour after hour of hard, backbreaking work in the oilfields. He didn't like the thought of Jack Lomack in trouble.

It looked like that was the case, though. Lomack kept up the jovial front until after their drinks had arrived, laughing over the reminiscences of earlier, wilder days. But then as he wrapped his fingers around a tumbler full of whiskey and took a long swallow from it, Shayne saw the change come over his face.

"What's the trouble, Jack?" Shayne asked as he sipped on the cognac he had ordered.

Lomack put his glass down carelessly, sloshing some of the amber liquid out. He ignored it and sighed heavily. "It's pretty simple, Mike," he said. "Some folks back in Texas think I killed about two dozen people."

Shayne's glass stopped halfway to his mouth. He had heard a lot of surprising statements in his years as a private detective, and he had learned to automatically stifle his reactions. But he couldn't prevent the sudden tightening of his face, the narrowing of his eyes as he frowned. And he couldn't stop the hand that lifted to his earlobe, to tug on it absently.

"Doesn't sound too good, Jack," he said after a long moment of silence. "Maybe you'd better start at the beginning."

Lomack showed his age more now as he said, "I guess you heard about the drilling rig going down off the South Texas coast a few weeks back. That was one of my rigs, Mike."

Shayne remembered seeing the story on a television newscast. He said, "I didn't hear much about it, but I know what you're talking about. There was some kind of explosion on the rig and it sank, is that right?"

"Right. It sank, with twenty-seven people on it. By the time the rescue people got there, only two of them were still alive and hanging onto some debris. Those two are still alive, or at least they were when I left Texas; the other twenty-five are at the bottom of the Gulf."

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"And you're saying that somebody holds you responsible for that disaster?"

Lomack nodded. "The insurance company, for one. They've got an investigator on the case, and they're going to hold up my settlement as long as they can."

"That's normal, in a case that big, isn't it?"

"Yeah, I suppose so. And they know my company has been having some trouble lately." Lomack's fist came down on the table sharply. "But dammit, it's awful when somebody thinks you'd kill all those people just to get a little money."

"It's been known to happen," Shayne said softly. "Not everybody is as honest as you, Jack."

"Crazy but honest," Lomack said, more than a trace of bitterness in his voice. He shook his head. "That's bad enough," he went on. "But then these things started showing up." He pulled a piece of paper from his pocket and put it on the table.

Shayne started to take it, then stopped the motion abruptly and asked, "Is this something the cops should be checking for fingerprints?"

Lomack waved a hand. "Don't worry about that. They've got the others. When this one came, I decided it was time I did something on my own. I came to see you."

Shayne picked up the paper and unfolded it. It was plain white paper, and someone had printed a message on it in block letters. It said:

> YOU ARE A MURDERER AND WILL PAY FOR YOUR CRIME, JACK LOMACK. THE DEATHS OF TWENTY-FIVE WILL BE AVENGED. YOU WILL KNOW THE PAIN THAT THEIR FAMILIES HAVE KNOWN.

It was unsigned, and Shayne knew that the printing would contain no clues as to the author of it.

"There have been more of these?" he asked Lomack.

"Several. I tried not to let them bother me too much. Oh, I brought the cops in on it, that was the only reasonable thing to do, but they weren't able to find out who was sending them. It was only when I got this one that I really started to get scared."

"Why this one?"

Lomack's hands clenched into fists. "Because this one was the first one I could take to be a threat to Maggie."

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"Maggie?" Shayne remembered plenty of women in Lomack's life, but that name rang no bells.

"My wife." Lomack's gaze got far away. "Loveliest woman you ever saw in your life. Certainly the loveliest one I ever saw. The note says I'll feel the same pain as the families of the men that went down with the rig. Maggie's the only family I've got, so that must mean she's going to be taken away from me."

The pain and anxiety he was feeling came through in his voice. Shayne was quiet for a moment, digesting what Lomack had told him. Finally, he said, "Try not to borrow trouble, Jack. Whoever wrote the letter might not have meant any harm to your wife."

"Then what else can it mean, dammit?"

Shayne didn't have an answer for that one. He gave Lomack a second for the burst of anger and frustration to pass, then asked, "Is it possible that sabotage was responsible for the sinking of the oil rig?"

"It sure as hell is. Like I said, the insurance company is investigating, and they haven't decided yet just what did cause the trouble. One thing's for sure — it wasn't weather-related. The night was calm and clear. The two survivors haven't been able to talk much yet — They're both still in the hospital, in serious condition — but they both remember there was an explosion before the rig went under."

"Had you been out there recently?"

"The day before. I know what the insurance people think. They think I hid a bomb out there with a timer on it. But they'll never prove it, because it didn't happen."

Shayne swallowed the last of his Martell and signaled the bartender for a refill. "Assuming that the explosion was deliberate," he said, "I think we can rule out any of the men on the rig as the one who planted the bomb. Who else was out there and then left?"

Lomack shrugged. "I don't know for sure. Several people could have been out there . . . My operations manager, the drilling coordinator, other people in the company, maybe . . . ."

"You haven't checked any of them out?"

"I'm sure the police have, but they wouldn't tell me anything. Makes me think they didn't find anything incriminating about anybody else and still consider me the prime suspect. But that's one reason I'm here. I want you to check *everything* out, Mike. If it was sabotage and murder, find that out and find out why. That's the only way the insurance company will be satisfied . . . and the only way I can get rid of the nut who's sending me those threats." Lomack's voice dropped, and Shayne had to listen closely to hear the intense words. "Besides, if it was sabotage, some bastard killed twenty-five men. Nobody should get

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away with something like that."

Lomack was sincere, Shayne was sure of that. And he was sure what his answer to Lomack's proposal was going to be.

I'll find the answers, Jack," he said. "You can count on that."

The old familiar grin came back on Lomack's face. "I knew you'd take me up on it," he said. "Mike Shayne never could resist a challenge. I'm booked on a flight back to Corpus tonight. Is that too soon for you to leave?"

Shayne shook his head. "I'll make a few phone calls to clear the decks here, then head back to my place and pack a bag."

Lomack lifted his glass. "Here's to the two of us," he said. "We'll raise hell, just like we did in the old days."

"Sure, Jack," Shayne said, raising his glass and clinking it against Lomack's.

II

SOME THINGS NEVER CHANGE, SHAYNE WAS THINKING AS HE put clothes in a small suitcase in his apartment a little while later, and some things can't help but change. Jack Lomack still had the same spirit he had always possessed, but years of making his living mostly behind a desk had changed his capabilities. The Jack Lomack he had known before would have charged any problem headon, never asking for help. He might be grateful for any help that he got, but he wouldn't *ask* for it. Now Lomack knew he was out of his element and had wisely sought out Shayne.

Lomack's business was oil. Shayne's was murder.

He snapped the suitcase shut and carried it out into the living room of his apartment. Lomack was prowling around the room, another drink in his hand, too tense to stand still and wait. Shayne said, "I'm ready to go, Jack. I called Lucy and let her know where to find me for the next few days."

Lomack tossed off the rest of his drink and said, "I want to meet this Lucy of yours when all this trouble is cleared up. I'm sure she's a hell of a girl, though what she sees in an ugly son like you is beyond me."

Shayne was glad to hear the bantering tone on Lomack's voice again. The man might be down, but he was far from out. He hefted the suitcase, grasped Lomack's arm, and said, "Come on, Jack. Let's go to Texas."

LOMACK WAS FAIRLY QUIET DURING THE RIDE OUT TO THE airport in Shayne's Buick, quieter still as they boarded the big American Airlines jet bound for Corpus Christi. This evening flight

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wasn't heavily traveled, and Shayne hoped to put the time in the air to good use.

He started by getting Lomack to tell him all he knew about the sinking of the offshore drilling rig. Thinking about it was obviously a burden on Lomack, but Shayne knew he had to have all the background of the case if he was to have any chance of cracking it.

"The thing of it is, it could have been an accident," Lomack said. "Something could have happened with the equipment to cause an explosion. We've had divers down, checking what's left of the platform to see if they can find any trace of something that shouldn't have been there. So far, nothing has turned up. And everything my company has done has been gone over and taken several steps further by the insurance investigators. That rig was insured for millions of dollars, Mike, and those boys don't trust old Jack like you do."

"They're just trying to run their business the best they know how," Shayne commented.

Lomack nodded emphatically. "Oh, hell, I know that. I don't have to like it, but I know it. What I can't figure out . . ." He paused, and Shayne waited silently for him to go on. "Well, most of this has been kept out of the papers. How did whoever's sending those threatening notes know that I'm a suspect in this? It doesn't make sense to me."

Shayne's eyes narrowed. "That is a good question," he said slowly. "One that we're definitely going to have to answer."

Lomack went on talking about the tragedy at sea and its aftermath, and Shayne took it all in, filing it all away in his keen brain. When Lomack was through, Shayne changed the subject abruptly by saying, "Tell me about Maggie."

The smile that flashed across Lomack's face told Shayne a lot. Even though a look of concern replaced the expression a second later. Lomack said, "One beautiful lady, let me tell you, Mike. And the smartest one I ever met, too. She worked for me for nearly seven years before I talked her into marrying me. Went from the steno pool to accounting and right up into management. She was Mitch Lund's executive assistant when I finally got her to say yes."

"Lund is your operations manager, right?" Shayne asked, running his memory over what Lomack had told him about the personnel of his company.

"Yeah. Good man. The things that he and Maggie and John Morrall did made the company a whole hell of a lot easier to run. It almost ran itself most of the time."

Shayne remembered Morrall's name, too. The man was the drilling coordinator. If Shayne understood the set-up properly, Morrall and

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Lund were in charge of most of the day to day activities of the company. Lomack might set things in motion, but the other two men kept them going. That meant they would be intimately familiar with the details of the drilling rig, and Shayne meant to talk to them at length as soon as he got a chance.

"You sound like marriage agrees with you, Jack," Shayne said.

"Best thing that ever happened to me, that's all." His fingers knotted together. "That's why I got so damned worried and decided to come get you. I don't want anything happening to Maggie, Mike."

"What precautions have you taken besides coming to see me? Have you hired some kind of security service?"

Lomack nodded. "There's a man there at the house twenty-four hours a day, armed and ready in case anything starts to happen. I'm praying that it doesn't, but . . . ."

"It never hurts to be sure," Shayne told him.

THE BIG DETECTIVE LEANED BACK IN HIS SEAT AND FISHED A cigarette out. As he lit it, he looked out the window beside him at the night sliding by outside. There was nothing to see but darkness. Must be what it was like at the bottom of the Gulf, under hundreds of feet of water, he mused. The thought didn't do anything for his peace of mind.

Lomack had fallen silent again, and Shayne didn't bother trying to draw him out for a few minutes. Instead, he thought about everything that he had been told, and he didn't like some of the thoughts he was having.

Earlier, he had believed Lomack implicitly. But now, despite the old friendship between the two of them, Shayne found his investigator's natural curiosity at work. He had trained himself over the years to keep an open mind, to suspect everyone involved in a case, until he was sure that he held the truth in his hands. And this case, if he was going to investigate it, couldn't be any different.

Could Lomack have been responsible for the explosion that sent the rig down? Shayne's gut said no, but at the same time, the man had admitted that his company had been weathering some financial hard times. A big insurance settlement might have gone a long way toward ending that.

But would Lomack have been callous enough to murder so many men, just to collect some money? Again, everything inside Shayne denied it . . . but he hadn't seen Lomack in a lot of years. Anyone can change, Shayne thought. It was just a question of how much change was possible in one man.

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There were other angles to be considered, though. Someone else could have had a reason to blow up the rig. Lomack had been unable to come up with any likely suspects when Shayne asked him about that, but Shayne knew very well that no one becomes much of a success in the oil business without making some enemies along the way. It could have been someone who wanted to hurt Lomack and his company, and in an even more chilling possibility, it could have been someone with a grudge against just one man working on that rig. Shayne knew that things like that had happened before; trains and planes had been bombed with tremendous loss of life, just to get at one particular person.

Shayne ground out his cigarette in the ashtray and leaned his head back against the seat, closing his gray eyes. Those were all things that would have to be looked into when they arrived, but the answers wouldn't be found here in this airplane. The answers, if there were any, were waiting in Texas.

IT WAS NOT QUITE TEN O'CLOCK, LOCAL TIME, WHEN THE flight arrived in Corpus Christi. As the plane nosed down over the coastal city, Shayne remembered all the other times he had been in the Lone Star state, riding into Houston on oil tankers as a young man, roughnecking in the oil patches out in West Texas, returning to El Paso as a private detective to solve several murders and clear up a very messy political scandal. The times spent here had been good ones, if a little hectic. Shayne just hoped that this visit turned out as well as the last time he had come to Texas to investigate a murder. That case had ended with him owning a partial interest in a silver mine . . . .

"My car's in the lot here," Lomack said a few minutes later as they strode through the terminal after picking up their luggage. "I want you to stay with us, and we've got plenty of room, so don't go giving me an argument about it."

"I wasn't planning to," Shayne grinned.

He was struck by the similarities between Corpus Christi and Miami as Lomack wheeled his big car away from the airport and toward the bay. There were the same wide boulevards, lined with palm trees, the same marinas packed with pleasure craft, the same tang of salt in the air from the ocean. Shayne felt right at home.

Lomack turned the car onto Ocean Drive and piloted it past the huge homes there, facing the lapping waves of the Gulf from behind expansive, carefully cared for lawns. He said, "I guess the place is kind of gaudy, but you know how it is. People expect you to keep up a certain kind of image." He clucked his tongue against his teeth. "Damn, I

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can't believe I just said that. Before you go back to Miami, Mike, you and I are going to have to do some real old-fashioned hellraisin', show these people around here that Mad Jack's still got some life in him."

"Nobody would ever think that you didn't," Shayne assured him.

Lomack nodded at a house coming up on their right. "There's the place," he said. "Like I told you, plenty of room."

Shayne had to agree with that as he studied the house. There were enough lights on in it for him to tell that it was a sprawling three-story structure, built of stone with a steep, gabled roof. A wrought iron fence ran around the property, with a gate to one side that was standing open. As Lomack turned onto the long driveway that led up to the house, the headlights of his car swept over another vehicle that was parked by the house. Shayne saw the insignia of a private security company on its doors.

"I see the guard's on duty," Lomack grunted. "That's good to know."

Shayne started to nod in agreement, but something suddenly made him tense and sit forward. His eyes searched for and found the flicker of movement he had seen a second before. It was close to the house, in a section of shadow between two lighted windows.

Of course, it could have been the guard, making his rounds, but there had been a furtiveness about it that made Shayne's insides clench. He snapped, "Get up there in a hurry, Jack."

Lomack shot a puzzled glance at him, but he reacted to Shayne's command. His foot came down harder on the accelerator, and the big car shot forward.

Shayne wished he had his gun in its regular place in his shoulder holster. The whole rig was packed away in his suitcase, though, for the airline's sake. Maybe a gun wouldn't be necessary . . . .

Shayne still wished he had it.

HE SAW THE MOVEMENT AGAIN, CLOSE TO THE HOUSE, AND now he could tell for sure that it was a figure, running away from the driveway. Shayne barked, "Hold it!" and Lomack stomped the brake, rocking the car to a stop. In a flash, Shayne was out the door and running after the fleeing figure in the shadows, but not before he caught a glimpse of Lomack's suddenly-terrified face.

Shayne was barely aware of the slamming of Lomack's door behind him. The oilman ran toward the front door of the house, calling, "Maggie! Maggie, are you all right?"

The running figure ducked behind a shrub, and some instinct

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warned Shayne. He jerked to one side, and the night was split by a muzzle flash as a pistol blasted. There was a whining in the air next to Shayne's ear, and then he was throwing himself back the other way, zigzagging toward the shrub that concealed the gunman.

He might have gotten there if his foot hadn't hit the soft shape on the ground. Instead, Shayne went sprawling to the soft turf of the lawn.

He landed awkwardly, but was instantly rolling to one side. Another bullet chewed up the grass where he had been an instant earlier. As he went over and over, the world spinning crazily around him, he saw a fragmented image of Jack Lomack jerking open the door of his house and pausing there, framed against the light coming from inside.

"Jack!" Shayne roared, knowing that Lomack was a perfect target. "Get down!"

Lomack's head jerked around as he looked toward Shayne. The danger didn't come from the gunman in the shadows, though. It came from behind Lomack, from inside the big house.

As Shayne came surging up onto his feet again, he felt as much as heard the heavy, thumping explosion from inside the house. The ground shook in sympathy with it, and noise and flame licked out from the windows. The blast threw Lomack backwards, flinging him off the porch like a discarded doll, sending him hurtling to the ground several feet away.

Shayne's eyes snapped around. He was expecting a bullet to slam into his body, but the figure with the gun appeared to be gone. Whoever it had been, the work it had come to do was over now.

Shayne started toward the house in a staggering run. The whole place was ablaze now, and the bright glare it threw over the lawn showed Shayne what he had tripped over seconds before as he chased the intruder. It was the body of the security guard, and from the size of the bloodstain on the man's shirt, Shayne knew he was dead even before he paused long enough to feel for a pulse. Not finding one, he ran on toward the house and Lomack.

Lomack was on his feet now, screaming his wife's name against the crackling roar of the fire. He was shambling toward the burning building, his face contorted into a frozen, stunned mask, when Shayne reached him. The big redhead threw his arms around his friend and pulled him back. It took all of Shayne's strength.

They stumbled back, the heat from the blaze beating against them, and as they lost their balance and fell to the grass, Shayne saw Lomack's lips moving. The man wasn't screaming anymore, but Shayne knew he was whispering, "Maggie . . ."

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Corpus Christi was a lot like Miami, all right. It was full of sound and fury, death and destruction this night.

Mike Shayne felt right at home. And it was one of the worst feelings of his life.

III

SHAYNE'S MOOD HADN'T IMPROVED ANY BY THE NEXT morning. It was still as black as the charred beams of the house where Lomack had lived. He stood in front of the ruins, watching as men from the fire department and the police arson squad combed through what was left of the house.

"Think they'll find anything else?" Shayne asked the man standing next to him.

Lieutenant Travis Aguilar shrugged. He was in charge of the case, and the look on his lean, dark face told Shayne that he didn't much care for it, either.

"Do I think they'll find anything that'll help us?" Aguilar asked. "Not really. We're sure already that someone set the place to blow up; we found part of the incendiary device that didn't quite get consumed. And we found the woman's body."

Shayne's mouth quirked in a bitter grimace. He had been there when Maggie Lomack's remains were discovered, and he was just glad that her husband had been in a hospital room at the time, pumped full of a sedative and knocked out.

It was mid-morning now; the body had been discovered several hours earlier. Shayne said to Aguilar, "Any word yet from your forensic department?"

"Last I heard, they were still trying for a positive make. There's been some trouble coming up with dental records. The cause of death was pretty obvious, but I'm sure they'll check that, too."

"And you'll let me know what they find?" Shayne prodded.

Aguilar swung his gaze away from the burned house and toward Shayne. "I might," he said in a flat voice. "Just as a courtesy, you understand. I don't think I need to remind you Mr. Shayne, that you're not licensed to operate as a private investigator in the State of Texas. Nor are you licensed to carry a gun."

"I know that," Shayne replied in a voice just as flat. "But Jack Lomack asked me to look into this business for him, and I told him I would. I'd like to be able to keep my word."

"I've got no objections to you keeping abreast of the situation. Just don't try interfering with it."

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Shayne said nothing. He wasn't going to make any promises he knew he'd have a hard time keeping.

The two men stood in silence and watched the men in slickers and hard hats going through the rubble for several minutes. Then one of the arson investigators came out toward them, slapping ashes and soot off his gloves.

He shook his head as he approached them, saying, "I think we've found all we're going to find. I'm sure no one was in the house except the woman when the bomb went off, just like Mr. Lomack told us. Their maid's damn lucky last night was her night off. You'll get a full report from my office, Lieutenant, but I can tell you this much. Whoever torched this place didn't want it to have any chance to survive. He made sure the bomb had plenty of punch. We're just lucky we didn't lose the whole neighborhood."

SHAYNE REPRESSED A SHUDDER AS THE MAN'S WORDS recalled the moments after the blast when it looked like the whole world was going up in flames. It had taken quick, efficient work by the fire department — and a lot of luck, as the arson man had said — to keep the fire from spreading to the neighboring houses. The big lawns and the wide spaces between the houses had helped, but the disaster could have easily been worse.

"Thanks," Aguilar said to the arson man, then turned and stepped over a police barricade, heading toward his car parked at the curb. Shayne followed.

"What about the security guard?" Shayne asked, his long legs allowing him to catch up easily with the shorter man.

"Killed by one shot to the chest," Aguilar said. "I'd guess that the murderer got into the house, set up his bomb, then was leaving when the guard spotted him. That must have been just before you and Lomack arrived."

"You know about the threats that Lomack has been receiving, don't you?"

Aguilar nodded. "I know. I've been handling that, too, which is why I was assigned to this. We hadn't made any headway on finding out who was sending them. Maybe now we will."

"Lucky this happened, then," Shayne said bitterly.

Aguilar spun toward him, a finger stabbing the air. "Look, Shayne," he grated. "You've got no way of knowing this, but I worked for Jack Lomack a few years ago, before I became a cop. He and Mrs. Lomack are friends of mine. We'll find out who did this, and we'll find out if whoever did it also sent those notes. And I'm just as sorry as anybody

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else that this happened. But you stay out of it, understand?"

Shayne returned the man's intense look for a long moment, then said quietly, "I understand, all right. But you're wrong about one thing. You're not as sorry about this as Jack Lomack is."

Aguilar had no retort for that. He sighed after a second, then turned toward his car just as an officer waiting inside it held out a microphone to him. "Radio call for you, Lieutenant," he said. "It's Forensic."

Aguilar strode forward, motioning the other officer out of the car. He took the microphone and slid into the seat.

As he talked on the radio, Shayne took out a cigarette and put it between his lips. It was only when he reached for a light that he realized how the spurt of flame from a match would look to him at the moment.

He put the cigarette up and decided to wait until later.

Aguilar was through on the radio. He hung the microphone up and stepped back out of the car. Shayne came up to him as he leaned against the fender and sighed.

"What about it?" Shayne asked. "Or have you decided not to tell me?"

Aguilar's dark eyes locked with Shayne's icy gray ones. "I'll tell you," he said. "What I just heard doesn't really change things, though. They still don't have a positive ID on the body, but they found something else."

He paused, and Shayne growled, "Come on."

Aguilar rubbed at his jaw wearily. "Her skull was fractured."

Shayne grasped what he meant immediately. He said, "He knew, then. Whoever set the bomb knew she was in the house. It was no accident; he meant for her to die, might have even killed her before the blast went off."

"Knocked her around pretty good, at any rate. There were no fallen beams around the body when we found it. The wounds couldn't have been caused when the roof caved in."

Shayne grimaced. "We knew it was murder already."

"But now it's premeditated. The woman *could* have been an accident, if the torch didn't know she was there in the house, and the guard was probably just a moment of panic. He knew the woman was there, though, that's for sure now."

Shayne nodded and ran his thumbnail along the line of his jaw. After a moment, he said, "You think you could give me the name of that maid and a list of the men who died on the oil rig?"

A look of pure exasperation came over Aguilar's face. "So that you

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can start running around and conducting your own investigation? Didn't I just tell you to let us handle that, Shayne?"

Shayne shrugged. "Just thought I'd ask," he said casually. It would have been easier if Aguilar had given him the information, but that didn't mean he couldn't come up with it on his own. He started to turn away and said over his shoulder, "I'll be in touch."

"Hold it, Shayne," Aguilar barked. "Just what have you got in mind?"

"Somebody's got to get started on the funeral arrangements," Shayne bit off in return.

That was true enough, he reflected as he stalked away toward the rented car he had parked several feet away. Somebody *was* going to have to start thinking about things like that.

But not him. He had more important things to do . . . like finding a killer.

There were several ways to look at it, Shayne mused as he drove away from the place. The person who set off the firebomb could have been a grieving relative of one of the victims of the rig disaster. At least one person blamed Lomack for that, the person who had been sending the threatening notes. But there might be other reasons someone would want to strike at Lomack, and the controversy over the sinking of the oil rig might make a mighty convenient smokescreen.

For that matter, he thought, it wasn't even certain yet that the dead woman was Maggie Lomack.

That train of thought led to still more questions in Shayne's mind. He gave a mental shrug and decided that he didn't know enough about the case and its personalities to make an intelligent guess yet.

Which meant that he was just going to have to find out.

THE OFFICES OF THE LOMACK CORPORATION WERE IN A neat, two-story brick building not far from the harbor and the ship channel. Shayne drove over the high causeway spanning the harbor and followed the directions he had gotten from Lomack during one of the man's few coherent moments following the explosion. Despite the tragedy that had hit its owner, the place appeared to be business as usual this morning, Shayne saw as he pulled into a nearly full parking lot.

The carpet on the lobby floor was thick and soft, the music coming from concealed speakers muted and soothing. An attractive receptionist looked up from her desk with a smile and asked Shayne, "Can I help you, sir?"

"I'd like to see Mitch Lund and John Morrall," he replied. "My

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name is Mike Shayne; I'm a friend of Mr. Lomack's."

The smile on her face tightened a little. She must have assumed that he knew what had happened the night before. She said nervously, "I don't know if they're available right now, Mr. Shayne. You don't have an appointment —"

"I know," Shayne cut in on her. "But I'm looking into all the trouble Mr. Lomack's been having, and I really want to speak to them."

"Well . . ." she hesitated. "Mr. Morrall's not here, but I can call Mr. Lund . . ."

"Please." Shayne kept his tone polite, but she could see the determination on his lean face.

The girl picked up the phone on her desk, punched out a number quickly, then said, "Mr. Lund, there's a Mr. Shayne out here to see you. He says he's a friend of Mr. Lomack's"

The voice on the other end spoke back to her, and then she hung up, looking up at Shayne and saying, "He'll be right out."

A door on the other side of the room opened only seconds later, and a tall, thin man hurried out. He was young, only thirty or so, but his hair was so fair as to be almost white. He extended a hand to Shayne and said, "Mr. Shayne? I'm Mitch Lund. Jack's spoken of you often. Come on back to my office."

"Thanks for giving me a few minutes," Shayne said as he returned the handshake. "I won't take up much of your time."

"Take as much as you like," Lund said as he ushered Shayne down a corridor and into an office that was smaller but just as richly appointed as the lobby. He waved Shayne into a chair, then said, "Would you like a drink? Or some coffee?"

"Coffee," Shayne said. "But put a drink in it."

Lund looked haggard, as if he hadn't gotten much sleep the night before, but he grinned at Shayne's comment. He said, "I know the feeling," then went over to a small bar at the side of the room and poured two cups of coffee, adding a generous dollop of brandy to each one.

Shayne took a grateful swallow of it as Lund walked around behind his big desk and sat down. The operations manager of Lomack's company said, "What can I do for you, Mr. Shayne?"

"Jack asked me to come down here and investigate the sinking of his oil rig," Shayne said bluntly. "Now I'm going to investigate the bombing of his house and the murder of his wife, as well."

Lund winced. "God, that's an awful business. Terrible thing to happen. Do you or the police have any idea who did it?"

"The cops think it may be the same one who sent him some threat-

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ening notes, somebody who held a grudge against Jack and blamed him for the loss of that oil rig."

"He told me about the notes," Lund nodded. "Somebody is really warped if they think Jack had anything to do with sinking that platform."

"You and I know that. But there are a lot of crazy people in the world, people who might think that blowing up Lomack's house and wife would be a way of seeing justice done."

"That's crazy, all right."

"You're sure that Lomack *didn't* have anything to do with the rig going down?"

Lund's look of concern was momentarily replaced by one of anger, then he got the emotion under control. "You've known Jack a long time, Mr. Shayne. Do you think he's capable of destroying his own rig and killing a lot of people in the process?"

"I'm asking you," Shayne said.

"For the record, then. No, I do not think Jack had anything to do with it. It's just not possible."

"What happened, then?"

Lund clasped his fingers together on the desk. "Any number of things. Do you know much about drilling rigs, Mr. Shayne?"

"I used to, but it's been a lot of years. What I know is probably obsolete by now."

"You know what happens when a well goes up, though. Depending on what kind of gases are involved, it can be a pretty devastating explosion. I think someone was careless out there; someone caused a spark where he shouldn't have. The explosion threw the rig out of balance and it went down. That's not supposed to happen, but many things happen that aren't supposed to."

"It could have been sabotage, though?" Shayne asked.

"Of course it could have. But no one's found any proof of that. And they've been looking, I can promise you that. We've all been looking."

"If it was sabotage," Shayne began, then looked up at Lund, "who would have had a reason to do it? Who would want to hurt Lomack that bad?"

"I can only think of one man." Lund put his hands palm down on the desk. His face was bleak now, his anger coming through clearly. "You talk to Winslow," he said. "You talk to Dennis Winslow."

IV

TWENTY MINUTES LATER, AS SHAYNE LEFT THE BUILDING and walked out to his car, he reflected on what Mitch Lund had told him and hoped that the lead Lund had given him would result in

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something worthwhile.

Dennis Winslow was a name Shayne hadn't heard before, but it didn't take Lund long to fill him in. Winslow owned a small refinery up the coast a bit, and until recently, Jack Lomack had supplied him with the crude to keep his operation going. All that had changed, though, when the two men argued. Lomack had simply diverted Winslow's oil to another refinery, and since then, Winslow had been struggling just to keep from losing everything. It was the kind of story that Shayne knew was common in the oil business, two strong-willed men at odds with each other, with the stakes, even on this level, in the millions of dollars.

Other things had come out of the conversation with Lund, too. For one thing, the operations manager had indeed been out to the drilling rig a few days before the disaster. It wasn't unusual at all for him to visit the installation, but it proved that he did at least have an opportunity to plant a timebomb on the rig. His motive for doing such a thing was another question; from all that Shayne had seen of him, Lund was an honest, loyal employee to Jack Lomack.

His thoughts were interrupted by the sudden realization that someone was leaning on the fender of his car. The man doing the leaning was tall, well-dressed, and watching Shayne intently with piercing eyes. He was nearly bald, despite only being in his forties, Shayne would guess, and he looked about as friendly as a barracuda.

"Mike Shayne?" he asked as the big redhead walked up.

"That's right," Shayne acknowledged, "and that's my car you're leaning on. Who're you?" His voice was blunt. The last thing he was in the mood for was more trouble.

"My name is Earl Craig," the balding man said. "I think we're in the same business."

"You're the insurance investigator," Shayne guessed.

"Right." Craig named the company he worked for, then said, "Your reputation precedes you, Mr. Shayne. I hear that Jack Lomack hired you . . . to look into the sinking of his oil platform."

"You sound a little doubtful about that, Craig." There was an unctuous quality to the man that put Shayne's teeth on edge. The smirk on Craig's face only made it worse.

"Like I said, your reputation is pretty well-known. You've been known to pull some pretty raw stunts in the past. You'll do damn near anything for a client, won't you?"

Shayne didn't know whether to take a swing at the man or just ignore him and get in the car and drive off. He did neither. Instead, he held onto his temper and said, "You need to get your facts straight. Call

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some of your colleagues in Florida. I've done a lot of insurance work myself."

"Yes, but you're working for Lomack now." Craig straightened, and the smile dropped off of his face. "We don't need anyone else poking into this case, Shayne. I'll get to the bottom of it and find out if Lomack really did cause that explosion himself."

"You don't sound like you doubt that very much."

The smirk came back. "I don't. I'm convinced that Lomack is guilty as hell. It's just a matter of proving it now."

Shayne's fingers were trying to clench into fists. He made them relax and said, "I guess you heard what happened last night."

A brief shadow passed over Craig's face. "That doesn't change things," he snapped. "Some lunatic takes the law into his own hands and blows Lomack's house up. Well, I'm sorry it happened, but that's not my concern, Shayne. All I care about is getting to the truth about that oil rig."

Shayne had had enough. He stepped forward, and Craig moved out of his way. Shayne grasped the car door and opened it, then looked over his shoulder and grated, "You've got an ax to grind with Lomack for some reason, and that worries me, Craig. Especially since it's not public knowledge that your company is investigating the sinking of the rig." His voice dropped and became even more intense. "Somebody else found out about that, found out that Lomack is a suspect in the sabotage, if there was any. How do you think that happened, Craig?"

Shayne slammed the door before the man could answer, started the car, and pulled away, leaving Craig standing there with an angry look on his face.

That was interesting, Shayne mused as he drove away. Craig was definitely hostile toward Lomack and was determined to prove that Lomack was behind the blast that had sunk the rig. The leak that had established Lomack's guilt in the mind of at least one other person, the one who had been sending the notes, had to have come from one of three sources — Lomack's people, the cops, or the insurance company.

Had Craig told someone else that he thought Lomack was guilty? And was his vendetta against the oilman a personal one, or was Craig just another example of the syndrome Shayne had seen in other bureaucrats — that everyone was guilty until proven innocent?

Shayne's mouth quirked in a short, ironic grin. It was starting to look like Lomack had a lot more enemies than he had thought he had. That seemed to happen often to people who were too good-natured to hold grudges themselves . . . .

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WINSLOW HAD AN OFFICE IN CORPUS CHRISTI, LUND HAD told Shayne, though his refinery was twenty-five or thirty miles up the coast. Shayne followed the directions Lomack's operations manager had given him and found the place without too much trouble.

Seeing Winslow was another matter entirely, though, he discovered. The pretty but nervous girl at the desk in the office told him, "I'm sorry, sir, but Mr. Winslow is out of town right now. He won't be back until next week. If you'd like to make an appointment then . . .?"

"No thanks," Shayne grunted. "You don't know where I can reach him now?"

She shrugged helplessly. "He didn't leave me an itinerary. When he called me last night, he just said he was taking a short vacation."

"Last night?" Shayne tried not to sound too interested.

"Yes, sir, he called late last night. I was really surprised . . ." She broke off, realizing that she might be revealing more than her boss would want her to. "You're sure you don't want to make an appointment?"

"I'll check back if I do," Shayne told her, then left the office with still more questions buzzing around in his head.

Someone was waiting for him this time, too.

Lieutenant Aguilar stepped out of his unmarked car as Shayne approached. There was a smile on his lips, but not in his eyes. He said, "I didn't expect to see you here, Mr. Shayne. I thought you were going to be making funeral arrangements. Do you mind telling me what you're doing?"

"Just asking a few questions," Shayne said shortly.

"I hope you're not representing yourself as a licensed private investigator, or worse, as a member of the police force."

A curt laugh escaped from Shayne's lips. "And I hope you don't think I'm that stupid, Lieutenant. No, I'm just acting in my capacity as a private citizen with an interest in this case."

"Most private citizens don't go around investigating bombs and explosions and possible mass murders," Aguilar said softly. "They leave those things for the police. That's the smart thing to do."

"Maybe I'm not smart. But I do know that Lomack was on the outs with Dennis Winslow, and I know that Winslow supposedly left town in a hurry last night. Sound interesting, Lieutenant?"

Aguilar's eyes narrowed. Under his breath, he said, "I knew Winslow wasn't at home, but —" He broke off, then went on in a louder voice, "Look, Shayne, if you're not going to butt out, then maybe we'd better talk. No point in us duplicating everything the other one is doing."

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"You mean you'd spill what you've got so far?" Shayne had his doubts that Aguilar meant it, and that came through in his voice.

"You want proof? All right. We know that someone let it slip that Lomack was being investigated. We know that he and Winslow were having trouble. We know that both Mitch Lund and John Morrall were out at that rig just a couple of days before the explosion. And those two, plus Lomack, were the *only* ones out there who weren't there when it went down. The crew changed every five days out there, and the next change wasn't due until the next day. That enough for you?"

Shayne put a hip against the car and lit a cigarette. There was a warm breeze coming off the Gulf, and it would have felt good if he hadn't been so wrapped up in what Aguilar was saying. After a moment, he said, "You've checked out Lund and Morrall?"

Aguilar nodded. "They look clean. You're thinking that maybe one of them sold out to Winslow and planted the bomb?"

"It's a possibility. Then they leaked the fact that Lomack was a suspect to some of the families of the dead men, again trying to cause more trouble for Lomack."

"And if one of them was doing all this for Winslow," Aguilar speculated, "then Winslow could have gotten scared when someone actually took the grudge against Lomack far enough to blow up the man's house. Winslow ran because he was afraid someone would connect him with the whole thing, maybe through Lund or Morrall."

"It plays," Shayne said, frowning in concentration. The theory covered all the bases and answered all the questions, as far as he could see.

But there was something nagging at him, something that said the explanation was out of kilter somewhere.

A thought suddenly occured to him. He asked Aguilar, "Did your boys ever come up with a positive identification of the woman found in Lomack's house?"

Aguilar frowned. The newly-found openness between the two men was still tentative, and he hesitated before saying, "They've run into some trouble there. Mrs. Lomack never had much dental work done. They've found nothing inconsistent with it being her corpse, but —"

"But they still can't be sure, right?" Shayne cut in.

"We're keeping the possibility of a switch in mind," the lieutenant assured him. "It's your turn to talk now, Shayne. Do you have anything that makes you think it wasn't Lomack's wife?"

"Not a thing," Shayne told him. "Just some uneasy feelings. One other thing I was wondering about. Earl Craig, the man running the

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insurance investigation, seems to have something against Lomack, too."

Aguilar nodded. "You don't know Craig, Shayne, so I can see why you'd wonder about him. He hates everybody; to his mind, every claim against his company is fraudulent. I guess that's why they hired him."

Shayne nodded in acknowledgement of the information and then reached for the door handle on the car. "Thanks," he said. "I'm glad we're not going to be knocking heads on this."

"Wait a minute," Aguilar said. "What are you going to do now?"

"I thought it was about time I paid a visit to John Morrall. I talked to Lund earlier, and he told me that Morrall was at another drilling rig up the coast, this one on land."

Aguilar waited a moment to reply, obviously mulling something over in his mind. Then he abruptly said, "Oh, what the hell. No point in you paying that car rental place any more than you have to. I was just going to see Morrall myself, since Winslow's ducked out. Want to ride along with me?"

"Thanks," Shayne grinned. "I think I'll take you up on it."

"Okay. I'll have to stop at a phone and call in first, let the station know where I'm going. My radio went out, and they've got me calling in pretty regular."

Shayne smiled. It sounded like Aguilar felt the same way about going through channels as he did. The lieutenant's irritation with his superiors was obvious.

THEY DROVE IN AGUILAR'S CAR OVER NUECES BAY, GOING north and following the coastline. For the moment, speculation about the case was put aside, as Aguilar asked Shayne about his career in Miami and his relations with the police there. When Shayne hesitated, Aguilar grinned and said, "I might as well tell you, Shayne, I've met both Will Gentry and Peter Painter at police conventions before. So I've heard about you from both sides of Biscayne Bay."

Shayne had to grin at that, imagining the difference in the comments from Gentry and Painter, the chiefs of police in Miami and Miami Beach respectively. "Will and I have worked together pretty effectively," he said. "Painter's another story."

"I know." The way Aguilar said it made Shayne chuckle.

Aguilar was sharp enough, Shayne decided during the halfhour ride, and he was glad the lieutenant had stopped being hostile to him, even though he was certain that Aguilar's motives were strictly pragmatic. He had realized that Shayne wasn't going to leave the case alone and decided that it would be easier to keep an eye on him like this. Shayne

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didn't care about that. All he wanted to do was find out who had caused so much trouble for Jack Lomack, and he didn't care how.

Aguilar turned off the state highway they had been following a few miles further on, onto a smaller blacktop road. It soon turned into a dirt road, and Shayne saw the derrick up ahead, in the middle of a grassy field. They were a few miles away from the Gulf now, but it still made its presence known by the smell in the air. There was the bite of sulphur in it, too.

An open area surrounded the oil rig. Aguilar parked at the edge of it. The two men got out of the car and walked toward a small mobile home parked a good distance away from the derrick. Shayne knew this was where Morrall would likely be found; the trailer would serve as a field office and a place for the roughnecks to catch a few winks of sleep when they got the chance.

Shayne and Aguilar were still twenty or thirty feet from the trailer when its door opened and a man stepped outside. He kept one hand on the doorjamb and regarded them curiously. There was a yellow hard hat on his head, and he wore coveralls like the other men who were scrambling around the rig. Shayne glanced over at the lieutenant, and Aguilar nodded. They had found John Morrall.

The steady rumble of the derrick's engines filled their ears as they approached the trailer and Morrall. It was a familiar sound to Shayne, well-remembered from his past.

They never even heard the rifle shot.

But its results were all too evident. Morrall jerked back, grabbing at his chest, slumping against the trailer. His mouth opened wide, but the agonized cry he must have given was lost in the roar from the derrick.

Shayne launched into a run, covering the distance to the trailer with a few strides of his long legs. Aguilar was right behind him. Expecting more shots at any second, Shayne took hold of Morrall's arm and dove into the trailer, pulling the wounded man with him. Aguilar followed, whipping his gun out and spinning to cover the area behind them as he leaped into the trailer.

Shayne was aware of shouts coming from outside. The men on the rig must have seen part of what happened and wondered what was going on. They would be running over to check on the safety of their boss.

"I don't see a damned thing," Aguilar snapped, raising his voice enough so that Shayne could hear him.

"Must have been a rifle," Shayne said, crouching beside Morrall's limp body and searching for a pulse. "Could have come from anywhere around here."

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Aguilar glanced over his shoulder, his face tight and worried. "How's Morrall?" he asked.

Shayne's heavy sigh was answer enough. The bleak look on his face and the grim words just confirmed the situation.

"He won't be telling us a thing," Shayne said. "He's dead."

V

IT WAS TOUCH AND GO FOR A FEW MINUTES. ALL THE ANGRY roughnecks knew was that Morrall had been shot, and Shayne and Aguilar had been found right there with the dead man. Aguilar's badge had bought them some time, though, and the lieutenant was able to convince the men that he and Shayne had had nothing to do with the murder.

There was a phone in the trailer. Aguilar got on it as soon as he could and called for help. More officers and a technical crew were on the way now, but until they got there, all Aguilar and Shayne could do was sit in the trailer with the corpse and try to figure out what had happened.

"It's got to be Winslow," Aguilar said fervently, obviously furious now. "He's been keeping an eye on Morrall, and when he saw us come up, he decided that he couldn't risk us questioning Morrall."

"Because Morrall was acting on Winslow's orders when he planted the bomb on the oil platform?" Shayne speculated.

"That's the way it looks to me."

"Was there any history of trouble between Morrall and Jack Lomack?"

"None that my investigations turned up," Aguilar admitted. "But every man's got his price."

Shayne looked thoughtful. The moment of silence following Aguilar's comment stretched out as Shayne reached up to pull on his earlobe and frown.

"It's only a matter of time now," Aguilar finally went on. "We'll catch up to Winslow. I really figured he'd be a long way away from here by now, but I guess he felt like he had to hang around to take care of Morrall if we got too close."

"Yeah," Shayne said. Distraction was evident in his face and voice.

Aguilar watched the big detective from Miami for a minute, then shrugged and stepped outside the trailer. Shayne stayed where he was.

Death was following death in this case. First the twenty-five men on the oil rig, then the guard and the woman in the house, and now the man sprawled at Shayne's feet, covered with a blanket Aguilar had

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found. There seemed to be no limit on murder here in Texas.

Or was there . . .?

THE POLICE TECHNICIANS AND MORE DETECTIVES SHOWED up within half an hour, and Shayne and Aguilar each went over what had happened several times. The angle of the fatal bullet was calculated as best it could be, which was only roughly, and uniformed officers were sent out to search in that direction for several hundred yards. Shayne had his doubts that they would find any evidence of the sniper.

The body was taken away, and after what seemed like forever, Aguilar was ready to leave, too. Shayne caught him before he left and said, "How about a lift back to my car, Lieutenant? I left it outside of Winslow's office, you'll remember."

"Sure," Aguilar nodded. "Come on."

The two men were fairly quiet on the ride back into Corpus Christi. Aguilar seemed convinced now that his theory about Winslow and Morrall was correct. Shayne wasn't so sure, but he didn't feel like discussing his doubts with the policeman.

It was late afternoon before they got back to where Shayne had left his rented car. As Shayne got out, he said, "Thanks for letting me tag along, Aguilar. I wish the day had turned out better."

"At least we've got a pretty good idea what happened now," Aguilar said. "Winslow won't be able to run far enough to get away forever, and I'll bet when we start looking closer into Morrall's finances, we'll find out that he got richer all of a sudden lately." The lieutenant paused and sighed wearily. "It's not a happy ending for any of us, but it's an ending. Like I told you, I've known Jack and Maggie for several years; I think he'll at least have more peace of mind if he knows the reasons behind what happened."

"Yeah," Shayne grunted, closing the door. "So long."

Aguilar leaned over and asked through the open window on the passenger side, "Going back to Miami, Shayne?"

Shayne lit a cigarette and looked out at the rays of the late afternoon sun slanting down on the Gulf. "Soon," he said. "I thought I'd stop by the hospital first and see Jack. He may still be knocked out, but I'd like to pay him a visit anyway."

"I understand. *Adios.*"

Shayne watched Aguilar drive away, then got in the car and pointed it toward the hospital.

As he drove, his mind was clicking over rapidly, going over everything he had seen and heard since meeting Jack Lomack in Miami only

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twenty-four hours before. He thought back on the things he had been told by Lomack and Lund, and by Aguilar and the insurance investigator, Earl Craig.

There was something . . . He had his fingers on it, and then it slipped away . . . .

THE NURSES AT THE HOSPITAL WEREN'T TOO HAPPY ABOUT letting Shayne into Lomack's room, but they didn't stop him. The oilman was still full of sedative, as Shayne had suspected he would be. He wasn't completely out, but he paid no attention when Shayne came into the room. Lomack gazed up at the ceiling through slitted lids, looking wan and drained. Shayne felt a wave of sympathy go through him, and he didn't like the feeling. Jack Lomack had never been the type to want sympathy.

But he would want answers. Aguilar had been right about that much. Lomack would want to know why and how this trouble had come to him, even if the answers might hurt worse than ignorance.

Shayne's eyes narrowed. It was there, the thing that had been bothering him, and he had his hands firmly on it now. Once it was in his grasp, the other facts started falling into line with it.

No, Lomack wouldn't like the answers. But now Shayne could give them to him.

VI

SHAYNE KNEW HE HAD BEEN LUCKY. HE HAD FIGURED THE whole thing out in time to get where he needed to be in order to follow the man he needed to follow, but it had been close. He had spotted his quarry as the man pulled out of a parking lot and fallen in behind him, tailing a little bit closer than he would have in Miami, simply because he wasn't as familiar with the city. It wouldn't matter, though; the man wouldn't be looking for a tail. He would be convinced by now that Shayne and everyone else were following the false trail he had laid out for them.

As he drove, Shayne could feel the grimmest of smiles tugging at his mouth. He wasn't looking forward to this confrontation, but it couldn't be avoided, either.

The trail led north out of Corpus, the way Shayne and Aguilar had gone earlier in the day. Full night had fallen now, and the taillights of the car ahead led Shayne on past the turn-off to the oil rig, through the town of Aransas Pass and into a series of small resort communities right on the coast. Shayne drove past motels full of vacationers and lighted fishing docks packed with amateur anglers. They were after

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flounder, trout, and redfish.

Shayne was fishing in deeper waters. He was after a killer.

The car he was following pulled in at a small string of cabins for rent, across the street from a beach and a boat basin full of shrimp boats. Shayne drove on past and made a right into the parking area beside the beach. He killed the lights and the engine, then got out of the car quietly, listening to the lapping of the waves against the sand.

He knew damn well he wasn't licensed to carry a gun in Texas, but his pistol rode in its holster anyway. He wasn't licensed to track down murderers here, either, but some things didn't have much respect for state lines. Quickly, with long strides, he crossed to the cabins and found the one he was looking for. The car he had followed was parked beside it.

The small cabin was lit up inside, but curtains closed off the windows and kept him from seeing in. As he stepped up on the little cement porch and leaned toward the door, though, he could hear the voices coming from inside. All it took was a few words to prove that he had been right.

Now he could get the rest of the answers for Lomack.

Shayne slipped the gun out and clasped it lightly in his hand. He couldn't open the screen door without making any noise, but that didn't matter. Even if the wooden door was locked, it looked flimsy enough that he knew it wouldn't slow him down.

There was no point in waiting now. Shayne grasped the screen door, threw it back, twisted the knob of the wooden door, and slammed into the cabin.

The man inside whirled, his hand going toward the revolver he wore at the small of his back. Shayne lined his sights on him and snapped. "Hold it, Aguilar! Don't touch it!"

AS LIEUTENANT TRAVIS AGUILAR FROZE IN FRONT OF Shayne's gun, the blonde woman lying on the bed sat up sharply and let a curse rip from her mouth. Shayne's gaze flicked over to her, and he said harshly, "You stay still, too, Maggie. I hope you don't mind me calling you by your first name, Mrs. Lomack."

Aguilar looked stunned. His dark eyes flicked from Shayne's face to the barrel of the gun, and his tongue came out and licked over suddenly-dry lips. He said huskily, "What the hell is this, Shayne?"

"The end of your plan," Shayne told him flatly. "The score stops going up now, Aguilar. There won't be any more murders."

"Wh-what are you talking about?" the blond woman quavered. "There haven't been any murders —"

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"Forget it," Shayne cut in. "Your boyfriend almost had me fooled, till I turned things around and looked at them from a different angle."

Aguilar stiffened, but he tried to put a confident look on his face. "Look, Shayne," he said, "you're already in trouble for busting in here like this and threatening us. Don't make it any harder on yourself by coming up with all kinds of wild accusations."

"Not just accusations." Shayne shook his head. "I'm going to come up with proof that you're behind this whole thing."

Aguilar snorted in derision. "You can't prove that I had anything to do with that platform sinking."

"That's right," Shayne admitted. "You didn't. I think it was just a tragic accident. Lomack and everybody else admitted that was a possibility, but sabotage seemed so much more likely. The investigation that you pressed, plus Earl Craig's interest in it, made it seem even more sinister. But the only thing sinister about it was the opportunity you saw to get what you wanted — Maggie Lomack and her husband's money."

Aguilar started to gesture angrily, stopped the movement when he saw Shayne's finger tightening on the trigger. He said hotly, "What if she is Maggie Lomack? That doesn't mean anything. I was just hiding her out so that the killer wouldn't find her."

"Then why didn't you tell anyone else? Secrecy, protection for Maggie?" Shayne nodded. "Plausible enough. You thought it through pretty well. Some of it just doesn't quite jibe."

"Like what?" Aguilar challenged.

"Like the fact that Dennis Winslow just barely had enough money to keep his business hanging on, from what I heard. How did he get hold of enough cash to pay off Morrall to sabotage the rig? You were the one who kept suggesting that theory, Aguilar."

Aguilar shook his head. "How do I know where Winslow got the money? We'll find out when we catch up to him. Why else would he shoot Morrall if he wasn't involved?"

"He didn't shoot Morrall." Shayne jerked his head at Maggie Lomack. "She did."

"You're crazy!" the woman exclaimed.

"You called her," Shayne pressed on, "before we went out to the drilling rig where Morrall was working. After you gave me that phony story about your radio not working, so that you could make a call in private. Maggie was hiding out somewhere, but she got there first and waited until we showed up, then put a bullet Morrall." Shayne's voice dropped. "He didn't even have the slightest idea why he died. He

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never knew he was just a pawn in the game you two were running. Like Winslow."

"And what does that mean?" Aguilar asked. "We might as well hear all of this fairy tale."

"You knew that Lomack and Winslow had been having troubles. You decided to set Winslow up as the villain behind all of it. After sending the notes to Lomack, notes that had to come from somebody on the inside of the investigation, you made it look like Winslow and Morrall sank the rig and that some grief-crazed relative of one of the dead men blew up Lomack's house. That way you had patsies to blame for all the trouble, and for Lomack's murder."

"But Lomack's not dead," Aguilar protested.

"That much of the plan didn't work," Shayne said, watching them closely. "Lomack was supposed to be back from Miami when the bomb went off. Instead, the only one unlucky enough to be there was the maid who must have come by for some unexpected reason. You hit her, probably harder than you intended to, and went back to setting up your bomb. Then you shot the guard as you were leaving. Too bad your time was so short. Otherwise you could have taken the maid's body with you and she wouldn't have been mistaken for Maggie Lomack."

Aguilar was still shaking his head, as if he didn't believe a word of it. The blonde was looking a lot more worried, though, Shayne noticed.

"That changed your plan quite a bit." Shayne went on. "Instead of Lomack being dead, you had to accept the fact that Maggie couldn't return now, not as long as Lomack was still alive. If she did, then the two of you would be right back where you started. No, all you could do was let Maggie stay dead in everyone else's mind. The two of you would just have to be content with what Maggie's been skimming away from the company ever since she worked for Jack."

"I'm not going to tell anybody anything except that you're a lunatic, Shayne. You'll see how wrong you are when we catch Winslow."

"That won't happen," Shayne said. "You killed Winslow after making him call his secretary and tell her he was going out of town. I imagine you dumped him in a bay somewhere."

"You'll still have to prove that," Maggie Lomack hissed, ignoring Aguilar's urgent shake of his head.

Shayne shrugged. "Digging can uncover a lot of things. Maybe evidence that you and Aguilar have been having an affair for a long time. Positive proof that Lomack's books have been doctored." Shayne smiled savagely. "Maybe even the gun you used to shoot Morrall, or the money you were going to use to start over somewhere far away from Corpus Christi."

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Aguilar laughed. "It's your word against ours, Shayne. An out of state PI versus a police lieutenant and the wife of a prominent local businessman. How are you going to even get anybody to believe you long enough to do that investigating you're talking about."

Shayne took a deep breath. Aguilar had a point; Shayne was sure his theory was right now, but proving it would be another matter entirely.

There was only one other thing on Shayne's side.

"Jack Lomack will believe me," he said. "In all the years I've known him, I never lied to him, and he knows it. We'll go to the hospital right now and stay there until he gets his wits back. Once the sedation wears off and I've laid the story out for him, he'll want to get to the bottom of it."

"He'd never believe you," Maggie said positively. "He loves me too much."

"Then he'd want to prove me wrong, wouldn't he?" Shayne counterpointed. "And the only way to do that would be to look into what I've got to say, find out once and for all who's telling the truth. How about it?" Shayne's mouth stretched in a grin, but his eyes were as hard and cold as ice. "Let's leave it up to Jack Lomack to decide."

The moment of silence that went by dragged like weeks. A bead of sweat rolled down Aguilar's forehead. Shayne felt like he had been standing there holding the gun forever.

"I won't go back to him," Maggie whispered. "I'll never go back!"

Shayne swung his eyes toward her just as she exploded off the bed, lunging toward him, getting between him and Aguilar. Shayne saw Aguilar grabbing for his gun again. He cursed, swung his free hand, snapping it around in a backhand blow that caught Maggie and sent her spinning away. She fell against Aguilar as his gun came around toward Shayne.

The gun blasted. Maggie jerked forward and screamed.

SHAYNE SAW THE SUDDEN BLOSSOM OF RED ON THE FRONT of her blouse, high on the right side. He was leaping forward even as Aguilar triggered off that first hasty shot. His arm lashed out, the barrel of his pistol seeking Aguilar's head.

The blow missed as Maggie slumped forward. Shayne felt her limp form tangling with his legs. Aguilar fired again, the shot sounding like an explosion in the small cabin. The bullet whipped by Shayne's head as he fell.

Shayne hooked with his leg even as he was falling, trying to knock Aguilar's feet from under him. The policeman sidestepped nimbly, face twisted in a hate-filled grimace, and sprinted for the door, bang-

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ing through it into the night.

Aguilar's cool had deserted him under fire, and Shayne felt a grim thrill at that. He came up into a crouch and paused only a second to check Maggie Lomack. She was breathing, and her pulse was slow but strong. With medical attention, she would probably be all right. There was no phone in the room, so Shayne hoped that someone else had heard the shooting and had already called for the cops.

He ran out of the cabin, hearing as he did so the squeal of tires on the street. Aguilar's car was gone. Shayne ran toward the street, past the palm trees that bordered the courtyard in the middle of the cabins, and saw Aguilar less than a block away. Shayne threw his gun up, sighted, prayed, and fired.

He squeezed off four fast shots. One of Aguilar's rear tires blew, and the rear window of the car shattered. It slewed from side to side, glanced off a tree and a garbage can, then rocked to a stop in the parking lot by the beach.

Aguilar was out of the car and running a second later, apparently unhurt. Shayne charged after him. There was a lot of shouting now. People were still out fishing, some of them on a pier extending out into the water, some of them on the concrete jetty that formed the boat basin. The curious shouts turned into frightened cries as Aguilar spun around, spotted Shayne, and sent slugs screaming toward him.

Shayne dove to the side, away from the gunfire. He rolled and came up running again. He might have been able to drop Aguilar with a shot, but there were too many innocent people around to risk it. He was going to have to take the killer hand to hand if he could.

Aguilar wasn't far ahead of him now. There wasn't much more room to run, either. He had come up against the basin with its multitude of shrimp boats. Another direction was closed off to Aguilar because there was nothing out there but the waters of the Gulf. And Shayne was behind him. That left the jetty, and it was a dead end.

Aguilar was too panic-stricken to think about that. He raced out onto the two-foot wide wall of concrete.

Shayne started after him. The waves were up slightly, splashing over the jetty, and the surface was slick. Aguilar turned and fired again. Shayne went to one knee for a second, then trotted forward again. He glanced over his shoulder. All the fishermen that had congregated in the area had cleared out now; they were there to catch fish, not to dodge bullets.

And then Shayne's eyes narrowed. One of the fishermen hadn't left. He was further out on the wall, and Aguilar was moving right toward him.

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If Aguilar took the man as a hostage . . . .

It was time for Shayne to do some shooting of his own, before it was too late. He dropped to a knee again, lifting his gun and calling into the night breezes, "Aguilar!"

Aguilar had almost reached the confused fisherman now. The burly, middle-aged man was only a few feet beyond the killer. Shayne wanted a clearer shot, but it didn't look like he was going to get it.

Aguilar turned again, not paying any attention to the fisherman. His own gun came up, and he and Shayne faced each other on the jetty, twenty feet apart, in one of those moments when time seems to freeze.

Neither one of them fired.

The startled fisherman loomed up behind Aguilar, holding a net on the end of a long metal rod. He swung it, cracking the rod down on Aguilar's wrist and sending the gun spinning out into the water. Shayne was on his feet again in an instant, charging across the space that separated them.

Aguilar cursed and tried to duck, but Shayne wasn't going to be denied now. His knobby fist shot out, brushing past the other man's feeble efforts to block the blow, and slammed into Aguilar's jaw. Aguilar's feet came up off the jetty. Arms pinwheeling, he flew off the concrete wall and splashed into the water a good five feet away.

The punch had made Shayne's arm hurt all the way up to the shoulder. It was a damn good feeling.

"Thanks," Shayne said, nodding to the fisherman. "You just helped capture a big one."

"Well, he made me lose the biggest fish I caught all day!" the man exclaimed.

Shayne smiled and turned away. There were sirens blaring from the shore, and when he turned around, he saw the flashing lights.

It had been a long, hard day. It was going to be an even longer night, Shayne knew.

But now Jack Lomack would have the answers.

—

"IT HURTS LIKE HELL," LOMACK WAS SAYING A FEW DAYS later. "And it'll take me a long time to even believe it, let alone get over it." He sighed and looked at Shayne, the sadness going deep in his eyes. "I guess I just loved her too much. It made me blind."

"They say that happens sometimes," Shayne agreed.

"I'll be all right," Lomack went on, looking out at the ocean across from his home. "Hell, there's still plenty of work to do. We may have got all the money back those two were going to steal, but with John

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dead and that rig lost . . . Well, I'm going to be plenty busy, let me tell you."

"Too busy to raise some of that hell you mentioned when we were coming down here?" Shayne asked.

Lomack's smile was bitter. "I'd just as soon not, if that's all right with you, Mike."

Shayne sipped from the tumbler of cognac he held and said, "Fine by me, Jack. I talked to Lucy earlier today, and I've got something I need to get back to. We'll make it next time."

"Sure, Mike. Sure."

Everybody coped in his own way, Shayne thought. He remembered other times, in years past, when something had hurt Jack Lomack. And Mad Jack had grinned and pushed up his sleeves and jumped right back into his work. Injury, hangover . . . heartbreak . . . Lomack would come through, Shayne was sure of that.

In the meantime, there were things for him to do, too. He was anxious to get back to Miami. From the way Lucy had talked on the phone, he might have some trouble coming up that would be every bit as tough as this job had been.

Yeah. Some things never changed. ●

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The man convicted of rape claimed he was innocent. So what else was new? Still, Siderman thought he might look into it. There might even be a Pulitzer Prize newspaper story there!

The Tenth File

by JERRY JACOBSON

THAT AFTERNOON, SIDERMAN HAD BEEN DARTING BACK AND forth between the several courtrooms of Franklin County Superior Court, his attention fractured like a cat's before ten balls of rolling yarn. Twenty-six years, man and boy, as the *Herald-Graphic's* police reporter, he couldn't recall a day filled with as much criminal variety.

Nine very serious matters had been before the courts that day. There had been five arraignments on charges of murder, two arson trials and a case of fraud and embezzlement. The latter rated as Siderman's favorite. A former used car dealer, who was now calling himself a rock-music entrepreneur, had been chased into court by no less than a dozen amateur "basement" rock bands.

Friends and relatives of the bands had shelled out over $120,000 for satin jumpsuits, strobe lights, speakers, amplifiers and flashpots, in addition to cash for promised recording studio time, demonstration tapes, with the modern day Music Man promising big-time recording contracts and concert dates just around the corner. Of course the only thing just around the corner was the shark-skin's car, gassed and idling and readied for a fast exit from town. The trial sessions had a definite lynch-mob feel to them and for the first time in a long time for Siderman, court reporting was fun.

Only a single important case among these was resolved that day, a cut-and-dried first-degree rape case involving a 25-year-old male and

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his 22-year-old female victim in an incident which had taken place in the vicinity of the airport some two months earlier. The jury's verdict had been a quick issuance and completely expected. The prosecution's case against the young man, in fact, had been so solid, Siderman could summon no genuine interest in the rapist's upcoming appeals.

One other case had been placed in the hands of the jury that, evening, which meant Siderman had to keep himself available in the event of a verdict until the jury was bedded down at ten p.m. So he wandered across the avenue from the Courts Building to a favorite watering hole of bailbondsmen, lawyers and process servers to serve out his time.

HE REMOVED FROM HIS GLASS SCARELY AN OUNCE OF HIS first Murphy's Irish when the bartender handed him the telephone receiver from behind the bar. The caller was Constantine Baker, the *Herald-Graphic's* night city editor, who had traced Siderman to the bar via a tedious process of elimination.

"We just received a call from county jail," the editor informed Siderman. "John Gideon just tried to hang himself in his cell. He was in a pretty bad way, raving and screaming and just a short step from being carted off to the lollipop farm. However, the jail guards *did* get out of him that he wanted to talk with the *Herald-Graphic* reporter who covered his trial. He seemed pretty adamant about not wanting to talk to anyone else. He further stated that if his request for an interview was denied, he'd find some way to end his life again and soon."

Siderman had to spend a minute or two drumming up a referent for the name John Gideon. Gideon, Gideon. Wasn't that the name of the rapist who had been convicted that afternoon? Siderman thought so. But John Gideon didn't know Siderman from a sackful of ball-bearings. Throughout the trial, they hadn't met and hadn't spoken and Siderman's attendance at the trial, besides, wouldn't have gained him a gold star. Though it embarrassed him to say so, John Gideon had been to him only a back stiffened in its seat at the defense table and a nervous hand constantly running itself through a head of dark, brown hair.

"Why does Gideon want to talk with me *specifically?*" Siderman asked his night editor. "We've never met and my stories on his trial were mostly composites from police reports and reports from the Airport Authority, hand-out stuff. If Gideon is looking for someone to champion his cause, he's searching in all the wrong nooks and crannies."

"It's my hunch he wants to issue you a confession," said Constan-

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tine Baker. "Eleventh-hour confessions aren't novel. We've both heard of hundreds of them. Just consider this an assignment, hear him out as far as his story will take him and then phone in what you get. The computers are down now, but I'll have a rewrite man handy to collect what Gideon gives you. If what he gives you is just razzle-dazzle to garner him a little publicity, then just give him a cookie and bid him adieu."

Siderman had listened to his fair share of convicted felons use and abuse the public presses on last-ditch efforts to escape punishment and he was a little too old and too wily now to fall for it. And he was tired and no longer really felt he was a member of an exalted profession, but just the pitiable device through which the successes and achievements of others passed, a flesh-and-bone conduit. And now, stuck here for the remainder of his working days in the backwashes of society where petty criminals drove him to Irish whisky and sleepless nights, another cry for justice and mercy was playing him for a patsy.

WHEN HE ARRIVED AT THE SEVENTH FLOOR OF THE COUNTY-City Building, John Gideon was still in the jail's dispensary. Siderman took a seat at one of the telephones in the visitor's area and glanced around for a bartender.

Twenty minutes passed in excruciating sobriety and then a solitary young man was ushered from the lock-up, saw Siderman was the only visitor and headed for the seat opposite him beyond the glass. Siderman noted a bluish welt beneath his right eye where he'd likely been struck while struggling to end his life. Now, because of his unstable frame of mind, he was restrained in ankle chains and handcuffs. The brown eyes looked tired and fearful, but Siderman wasn't being taken in altogether. He still regarded John Gideon a convicted rapist and behind bars where he properly belonged.

"Mr. Siderman?"

Siderman nodded, took out his press credentials and pressed them against the glass, then picked up the telephone.

"I guess you're wondering why I asked to see you and not any of the other reporters who covered my trial."

"The thought crossed my mind," Siderman told him.

"It was because you were the only one who didn't badger me to confess and pump me about my background and ask me about all my old girlfriends, like I was the three-headed man or the formaldehyde pig in a jar in some freak show."

"And to show your gratitude, you want to confess to me and give the *Herald-Graphic* a break," Siderman said.

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"You think I want to *confess?*" John Gideon rubbed his forehead in disbelief. "You think that's why I tried to kill myself? I tried to kill myself because I'm *innocent.* I've lost my job and I've lost my girlfriend and the press treats me like I'm Jack the Ripper in his formative years and I've just been convicted of first-degree rape! Can you see any possible reason why I would *want to live?*"

"You still have the appeals process ahead of you. You should be holding out some hope for that."

"With some judge lurking in the wings and just dying to wield his rubber stamp on me? That's what I have to look forward to?"

"Look, Mr. Gideon, you still haven't explained to me why you wanted to see me," Siderman said. "You *ought to be* trying to secure yourself a good lawyer, something a little more effective than a public defender."

"The first thing a *good* lawyer does, Mr. Siderman, is turn you upside-down and shake you to see what kind of money falls out of your pockets. I was a management trainee with a fast-foods chain at $600-a-month. My savings account looks like a bad joke and I can't even sell my car for cash because it's still in police impound. A *good* lawyer wants me for a client like he wants an old building to fall on him."

"Well, I don't practice law on the side, Mr. Gideon, so I'm not Legal Plan B. Suppose you just come to the point with me and tell me why I'm here."

AT PERHAPS BEING BRUSHED ASIDE AGAIN, THE BROWN EYES winced. But then the young man's jaw set. "Mr. Siderman, all during the time I was out on bail, before my trial began, I was looking for the guy who actually did this rape. Because I *knew* it wasn't me. Okay, so I failed the polygraph test. But any expert in the field will tell you a polygraph isn't 100 per cent accurate. Just normal *nervousness* will make that needle jump everywhere but up on the roof."

Siderman thought to interrupt but he didn't. It was best to let Gideon run out his string and get it all out of his system. Catharsis would not get him out of jail, but it was good for the soul.

"Those Airport Authority police, the county police, the city cops, the county prosecutor — they pegged me as a possible suspect and just ignored all the inconsistencies in the case to get a conviction and chalk another win up on the wall."

Siderman nodded, still thinking essentially about Irish whisky.

"Mr. Siderman, go to my apartment in King's Heights. Ask my roommate, Dick Rambowe, to give you my files and notes. I compiled them after my arrest and while the trial was in progress. The public

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defender they dished off on me wouldn't even *look* at them. You read it over, Mr. Siderman, all of it and you'll reach the same conclusion I did. The guy who did this crime is still walking around out there, laughing himself silly and rubbing his hands together and getting all heated up to do it again."

Well, here was a fresh wrinkle on an old dodge. Not a ranting and raving confession, but just a request to look at a little paperwork. Siderman was getting off easy.

"You just want me to go over your files and notes. Nothing else."

"Nothing else," said Gideon. "When you've finished reading them, and you're not convinced there's reasonable doubt about my guilt, then you can just walk away from it and there'll be no hard feelings."

The tortured face beyond the glass was telling Siderman about a young man's final straw. It looked like the face of the last homely girl at the dance with the music winding down and the lights coming up and no dancing partners in view. But there was something else now that was slowly persuading Siderman that this was just a little bit more than a desperate man's final weak trick pulled from a rabbitless hat and it was precisely this: a guilty man would not be putting a reporter on a trail of evidence if he knew that trail would lead only to himself. And therefore this was not the time nor the place to simply give a man a cookie and bid him goodbye.

Siderman took out a small notebook and a ballpoint pen. "What's the address of your apartment complex and your unit number?" he asked.

THE KING'S HEIGHTS SECTION WAS LOCATED SOUTH OF THE city, eight miles from the scene of the rape for which John Gideon had been convicted. His former apartment complex was a maze of ultra-modern modules of dark cedar, each unit with its individual carport. Siderman guessed the rents began at $400 per month and then ran up and sharply out of sight. Gideon and his roommate likely had tossed in together much in the manner of secretaries and airline stewardesses in an effort to live cheaply and yet in reasonable opulent surroundings.

Like Gideon, Dick Rambowe was also a management trainee with the firm Siderman had learned was Polar Bear Seafoods Corporation, the franchisee for one hundred West Coast Blye's Bounty Seafood Bars. To show his displeasure at Gideon's firing even before his trial had begun. Rambowe had taken a thirty-day leave of absence from Polar Bear. Siderman recalled reading an interview of Rambowe by another reporter in which Rambowe had expressed unbridled rage at his company for having judged his roommate and friend guilty even before

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his jury had been selected and seated. Under those circumstances, Siderman now doubted Rambowe would ever return to Polar Bear Corporation.

John Gideon's roommate answered the door to Unit 1026 dressed in an Eagles tee-shirt and tennis shorts. It was ten a.m. and he seemed not to have shaved since the conclusion of the trial the afternoon before. Beyond his shoulder Siderman could see a livingroom littered with packing boxes and the debris told a sad story about which Siderman knew he need not even ask.

"I suppose this is the post-mortem interview," Rambowe said, his malice softened in an attempt to be a gracious host. "You know, how does it feel to lose a roomie to the state penitentiary? Did I know John was a rapist all along? Was I asked to leave by the Sandpiper's management group before the lease was up? All of that?"

"No, none of that," Siderman said. "In fact, just the opposite. In fact, I'm halfway convinced John Gideon is innocent."

"Well, then, mister, you are standing in the shortest line since the opening of *Gates of Heaven*. The public wasn't interested in John's trial, his public defender damn sure wasn't and you press guys weren't exactly falling all over each other to get inside that courtroom."

"I admit to not being as strong an advocate of the accused as I should have been," Siderman said, and let his apology go at that.

Without having been asked about it, Rambowe now swept his hand around the room to explain the mess. "I'm picking up John's things and taking them over to his folks' place. Mine are next. With John's appeal bond set at $100,000, it isn't likely he'll be out pounding the pavement and looking for work. And my quitting at Polar Bear, well, I can afford to stay at the Sandpiper now like I can afford to buy the state of Texas and give half of it away."

Siderman was only now beginning to understand the collective destruction a criminal conviction could bring.

"I saw John at the county jail last night," Siderman told Rambowe. "He'd taken some notes on what he thought were discrepancies in the case, the investigation and the trial, and asked me to take a look at them."

RAMBOWE NODDED. HE WALKED ACROSS THE LIVINGROOM to a board-and-brick bookcase and took down a blue binder notebook.

"John called me this morning to let me know you might stop by for it. I mean, can you beat that Daffy Duck public defender the court dumped out on John? He didn't call John's parents to testify, even though John said he made a long-distance phone call from their home

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on the night of the rape. At *seven* p.m. exactly. I mean, the phone company *has a record* of that call. And the victim testified she was picked up by the rapist at 6:30, only on her police statement she said it was 6:45. She moved the time a full fifteen minutes. Either way, John can't be in two places at the same time."

Siderman nodded absently as he scanned the notes. They appeared to be detailed and meticulously drawn.

"John left his parents' home at 7:30 and got back here to the apartment around ten-to-eight," Rambowe was continuing, his indignation rising with each word spoken. "Now that's a twenty-minute drive and it always *will be!* But the police didn't even *bother* to interview either me or John's folks on it, even though John named all of us as defense witnesses. Hell, you'd almost think the public defender's *nephew* is a rapist and everybody's running around covering up for him."

"The court often views relatives and friends of a defendant to be prejudiced witnesses," Siderman told Rambowe. "The public defender may have thought it would be a waste of time to call them."

"But John's folks wouldn't lie! They're decent people!"

"Well, the public defender may have thought they wouldn't lie *generally,* but just *might lie* to keep their son out of prison. It's the P.D.'s job to determine when to take risks and when to decline to show his cards."

Rambowe heaved a sigh and returned to his packing. "Well, it was probably all over for John the minute he agreed to take the polygraph."

"Was he told that if he passed the test, the charge against him would be dropped?"

Rambowe nodded. "Only he *didn't* pass it. Hell, *nobody* is going to pass a lie detector test when his nerves are shot from being charges with rape out of the clear blue sky and then hustled all around a police department with handcuffs on your wrists and ink on your fingertips."

"Wish I'd have been there to advise him," Siderman told Rambowe. "Since a polygraph can't be admitted as evidence in a trial it has no validity. And if it has no validity, then the test can't be used as a basis for arrest. No prosecutor can refute logic like that no polygraph tester, either, all of which makes the test a waste of time and taxpayers' money."

"I'll tell you, Mr. Siderman, I know John better than I know anyone and I'd bet my precious hide he's in jail for another man's crime. You can bet the cops found a car similar to the one the victim described and when something begins to look too good to be true, the cops will run

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with it every time rather than break a sweat looking for somebody else."

"Well, now *I'm* looking for somebody else, Mr. Rambowe," Siderman told the young man. "And my attention isn't all that easily distracted."

ON THE WAY BACK TO HIS OWN APARTMENT, SIDERMAN WAS convinced of two things: first, he was certain John Gideon would not be sending him on the trail of additional evidence if Gideon knew that evidence would only tighten the noose around his own neck; and second, Siderman was certain he would make more headway if he proceeded on the premise that the actual rapist was still at-large.

Siderman spent the remainder of the morning and early afternoon familiarizing himself with John Gideon's notes. His key piece of unintroduced evidence was the time-factor surrounding the rape. Siderman was in immediate and total agreement with it. Gideon could not possibly have left his parents' home, picked up the victim in his car, driven her to the dead-end road on abandoned airport property, raped her, and then returned to his own apartment at the time Dick Rambowe said he did, given that Rambowe was telling the truth and Siderman thought he was. Prejudicial testimony, all of it, but Ed Wintermute, Gideon's public defender, hadn't even risked introducing it as evidence so that the testimony might find its way into the record. And that wasn't at all like Wintermute's usually aggressive style in a court of law. Siderman knew him to be generally a hard-charger. It was a change of character Siderman found difficult to explain.

It was later that same afternoon when Siderman tracked down Ed Wintermute in the heavy traffic of the Public Defender's Office. The young P.D. snatched a look at his watch and told Siderman he could spare him enough time for a fast cup of coffee in the basement cafeteria of the Courts Building, but no more.

"But this better not be a trip around the bush, Siderman. I've got eight clients going to trial tomorrow and four of them are still in county lock-up without a leg to stand on."

IN THE DRAB CAFETERIA, WINTERMUTE BEGAN TO WOLF down an apple turnover with his coffee.

"I wanted to talk to you about the John Gideon rape case," Siderman said the instant they were seated.

"That's no longer a case," Wintermute told him. "It's down on the books as a first-degree conviction."

"I admit I didn't follow the trial as closely as I should have," Sider-

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man went on hastily, "but after talking with Gideon, I'm convinced he's sitting in lock-up for a crime he didn't commit."

The public defender smiled commiserately. "Siderman, the wrong-man syndrome in jails is more prevalent than accidental falls in a BB-shot factory and you know it."

"And so are citizens convicted on circumstantial evidence. The victim, for instance, stated she was raped in an '81 compact. Gideon drove an '81 Chevette, a company car. But hell, Wintermute, sixty percent of the cars on the road are compacts. And the police didn't even line up *several* compacts for the victim to look at, only the one driven by John Gideon."

"The police had a suspect and they had the suspect's car in the Impound Garage, Siderman. It's a normal thing to take the victim to the suspect's vehicle to see if he or she can identify it. They can't run all over town collecting compact cars so the victim can make a *choice.*"

"Also," Siderman went on quickly, "the victim described the seat covers in the rapist's car as being of a material similar to velvet. Only John Gideon's car had vinyl seats."

"Which is similar to velvet, Siderman. The operative word here is *similar*. I don't see anything of conflict in that evidence."

"Okay, what about the victim testifying that the rapist wore a tan suit with matching vest? John Gideon swore under oath he didn't even *own* a tan suit. And his parents testified he left their house that night wearing dark blue slacks and a white pullover sweater."

Wintermute was shaking his head. "No cigar, Siderman. Any testimony given by the parents is considered prejudiced, you know that. And what John Gideon *says* he owns and doesn't own is purely his word against anyone else's."

"A police search of his apartment didn't turn a tan suit or a matching vest."

"And a rapist, if he's a *smart* rapist, will usually get rid of any evidence which might point to this guilt. And that includes the clothing he wore on the night of the rape. I defended John Gideon the best I could, Siderman, and that defense was more than he deserved. Now, if you have any more salient points to make, trot them out, because I am due back upstairs ten minutes ago."

"Okay, okay. Just one more point. About the photo montage the victim was given to identify the rapist."

"I don't recall seeing a police photo montage in the Gideon case," Wintermute said.

"Although the victim hadn't yet *seen* Gideon, of the six sets of photos showing males in full-face and profile, only Gideon's set wasn't

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split by a vertical black line and were, in fact, *smaller* than the five other sets." Siderman brought out a copy of the montage and slid it across the table. "It is suggestive and misleading, Wintermute, and you know it."

"All right," said the public defender, after analyzing the photos briefly, "I'll admit this montage is a pretty sloppy piece of work. But it's none of my affair how Vince DiBiasi puts together a montage. But *all the men* have short beards, like John Gideon. Adn *they all* are roughly the same age. Siderman, we're not dealing with high art here, just a hurry-up photo montage. I suggest you talk to Lt. DiBiasi about it if you think the montage was unfairly rendered." Wintermute glanced at his watch and finished off the last of his coffee. "Anything else, Siderman?"

Siderman had other doubts, but a man in a rush wasn't going to be an attentive audience. "No, that's all for now."

"For *now?* Siderman, this case is a closed matter with me. Ended, shut, finis. John Gideon is a convicted rapist, and there's nothing more I can do for him. Now upstairs, there is a county lock-up crammed with more prisoners than girls at the U.S.O. dance when the fleet's in town. And it is my job to get them all to trial before the floors collapse from their collective weight and the ones that aren't crushed in the fall are wandering the city at-large because of over-crowding and the inherent structural weakness of concrete. Don't call us, Siderman, we'll call you."

SIDERMAN FINISHED HIS COFFEE ALONE AND THEN LEFT THE basement of the Courts Building by a side exit and crossed the busy boulevard to the Public Safety Building. He took an elevator up to the police divisions on the seventh floor. One of the two detectives at work in the Assault/Rape Division was Vincent DiBiasi, a swarthy Greek of fifty with an olive complexion and unruly black eyebrows. They knew each other only slightly and so Siderman introduced himself and showed the detective his press credentials.

"Yes, Siderman," said the detective, pushing back from his paperwork, "what can I do for you?"

"I'm looking into the John Gideon rape case," Siderman told DiBiasi.

A faint smile appeared on the detective's face. "Well, I don't think you'll find much news in that, Siderman. Gideon's already been convicted."

"You were the investigating officer, is that right?"

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"That I was. The rape happened on Airport Authority property, but neither they nor the county people are equipped to do effective investigations in cases of rape, so we usually step in. Also, the victim in this case was a resident of the city."

"I was just across the street talking with Ed Wintermute, who was Gideon's attorney," Siderman told the detective. "He brought up the mattter of this photo montage you put together to show the victim. He said you showed him that montage at one point during the investigation."

"The montage? Yes, I seem to recall showing it to Wintermute. What about it?"

"Well, lieutenant, you'll excuse me for saying so, but that montage wasn't precisely cricket where John Gideon was concerned."

"How do you mean?"

"How I *mean* is, Gideon's photos were noticeably smaller than those of the other five suspects. And Gideon's show no vertical black line separating the two pictures."

Siderman saw the detective's dark eyes narrow, as though he was measuring Siderman now not as merely a pesterous journalist, but as an adversary come out of the woodwork.

Evenly, he said to Siderman, "I don't recall anything out of line with that particular montage. With a rape victim, everything has to be a little hurry-up. The memory of the events surrounding the assault tend to vanish pretty rapidly. The victim's subconscious mind goes to work almost immediately to lock the events away as being too horrid for the conscious mind to recall."

"I see. Do you remember off-hand who picked the other five subjects in the montage?"

"I did"

"And who exactly did you pick?"

DiBiasi's eyes again narrowed. "I don't think I understand what you're driving at, Siderman."

"I mean, were they suspects in other rapes, or males with records of arrest for rape? Or were they just randomly picked? You know, a cat burglar here, a shoplifter there. Or were they cops?"

"Just random. No cops. Just five guys with previous arrest records, all with short, dark brown beards and about the same age and height as the suspect. As I say, we were dealing with a time element here."

"But John Gideon wasn't arrested as a suspect until *five weeks after* the crime was committed," Siderman said.

"Five hours, five days, five weeks, what does it matter? We arrested the suspect, slapped together a photo montage and then showed it to

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the victim. We followed all the recognized procedures. The chief gave us high marks for that investigation."

Siderman nodded, thinking DiBiasi may have got high marks for his investigation, but not very high marks for telling the truth. Ed Wintermute had told Siderman he'd *never seen* the photo montage. So why was DiBiasi all too eager to agree Wintermute *had seen it* when Siderman indicated that was the case? Something had the aroma of a barrel of fish here. What was being exhibited here was far too much contact between an investigating detective and a member of the public defender's staff, more than was normal.

DiBiasi seemed fidgety to get back to work. "Look, if that's all, Siderman, I got a mountain of reports to get out here and my private secretary had the gall to go off shopping with Princess Grace in Monaco."

"Don't get up," Siderman told him, "I'll let myself out."

SIDERMAN MIGHT HAVE LEFT THE BUILDING THEN WERE IT not for the fact that his hunches were coming in bunches like bananas. He walked briskly to a public phone near the bank of elevators and punched off the digits for the Assault/Rape Division. The answering voice was that of the other detective Siderman had seen in the office.

"Assault/Rape, Lt. Colquitt."

"Is Lt. DiBiasi there?"

"Yes, but he's on the phone, sir. Is there something I can help you with?"

"No," Siderman told the detective, "I'll call him back later."

That was curious. Here was a detective, presumably up to his badge in paperwork and yet he had time to make a phone call. But then again it could have been a call he'd *taken* and not made.

Quickly Siderman broke the connection, slipped in another dime and nickel and dialed the Office of the Public Defender.

"Office of the Public Defender," answered a female's voice.

"Ed Wintermute, please."

"Mr. Wintermute is on the telephone, sir. Would you like to hold?"

"No, I'll catch him another time."

Elements in a puzzle were now beginning to show themselves in a teasing, elusive way, but Siderman's aging brain wasn't up to putting them together. This was piecework better left to men with younger, more facile minds, not to a battle-weary police reporter whose best days could be read in the alcoholic rings in a bartop.

But one thing *was* clear to him. Both Vincent DiBiasi and Ed Wintermute *might have been* conferring on a matter that was largely moot.

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Then, one or the other stood to gain or lose something by John Gideon's conviction or vindication. No. Not one or the other. *Both*. If only *one of them* was directly or indirectly involved, the other would simply turn him a cold shoulder and a deaf ear. In any event, a lot of people were suddenly showing more than casual interest in Siderman's inquiries.

IT WAS AFTER TEN P.M. WHEN SIDERMAN RETURNED HOME to his sidehill duplex on Dulanney Street, where it seemed he had always lived, just two buildings down from Fraley's Fine Foods, a dilapidated mom-and-pop's where it seemed he had always shopped, and across the street from the King Klean Coin-Op Laundramat where it seemed he had eternally done his dirty clothes. As well, he expected to die on this street, found propped up in bed one morning with a two-day-old copy of the New York *Times* collapsed on his chest like a faulty tent, filled with Pulitzer-caliber stories by which he had not gotten around to be inspired.

He had a lone Spencer steak in his refrigerator, a survivor piece of meat that was on the verge of turning from light brown to blue. It didn't look as though it would kill him and so he plopped it into a frying pan on his speed-heat burner turned up to full blast. He covered it with a lid to cut down the spatter and set a pan of water to boil for some vermicelli noodles. Protein and starch. Likely, they would do him in long before the actuary tables.

He tossed the noodles into the boiling water and then poured out some scotch, ran a bit of tap water onto it and dropped in an ice cube. All these things he did randomly, as though his fatigued brain were set on automatic pilot. What his brain had been thinking all these last few hours was a single thought: that John Gideon had been carefully set up for a crime of rape — and that someone had planned for him to be the fall-guy all along.

Upon reflection, Siderman felt it was all the culinary wizardry that saved his life. He had just stepped back into the livingroom when the shots rang out, so many shots that he was able to put a number to them only after he'd dug the bullets from the wall and collected the one imbedded in the painting and the last from the floor. His drink flew up into the air as he made a graceless dive to the carpet. He watched the venetian blinds at the front of the room dance like puppets as the bullets ricocheted off them. One bullet slammed into a painting of a collie dog protecting a lamb in the snowstorm, showering Siderman's backside with broken glass. He listened for the laboring whine of an automobile engine as it revved to continue on up Dulanney. When

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there was no such roar, he knew the car had travelled *down* the hill, which meant its driver likely had fired through an open window on the passenger side from behind the wheel.

Siderman let five minutes pass before he got to his feet. Smoke was wafting from the kitchen and water was hissing as it boiled from a pot and fell onto a hot burner. Siderman removed both pans and turned off the burners. He was drenched in scotch whisky and the lobe of his left ear was bleeding from a glass cut and his right palm was seered. But he was still alive.

No cars were on the street and the laundramat was empty. Elvira Loudermilk, Siderman's neighbor in the other half of the duplex, was away visiting a daughter in Palm Springs. It was so quiet out, a fleeting moment passed when Siderman thought the attack hadn't happened at all.

But, of course, it had. He found and extracted nine bullets from the wall. He picked up a tenth from the floor and pried an eleventh from the painting. An automatic pistol, with the casings ejected. And something of the attack told Siderman his assailant didn't want him dead, only scared. He had just been issued a stern warning to cease and desist.

For the time being, Siderman placed it all at the back of his mind, ate his charred steak and the vermicelli noodles, bandaged his hand and went to bed. He did not sleep soundly, but he slept, the series of naps merely a device to mark time until dawn.

IN THE MORNING HE CALLED A GLASS COMPANY AND WHILE he waited for them to arrive, placed a call to the parents of John Gideon. The boy's father had already left for work, but his mother was home and told Siderman she was eager to cooperate with him if it meant her son stood a chance of exoneration.

Siderman had only a single question to ask.

"Mrs. Gideon, the evening John paid you a visit was a Thursday, the night of the incident for which he was later arrested."

"Yes, Mr. Siderman, a Thursday."

"Did John ever visit you on any *other* Thursdays?"

"Oh, *every* Thursday, Mr. Siderman. Ever since he moved in with Dick Rambowe and they started their management training together. Sometimes he brought laundry home — his shirts, you know. Sometimes he brought a girl and they would stay for dinner. Mr. Siderman, do you have something in mind by asking the question?"

"Only that someone may have known or learned about your son's habit of visiting you, though for what reason and to what purpose still

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isn't clear to me."

An anxious pause fell across the line. Then, Mrs. Gideon said, "If John has to go to prison, it might spell the end for him. All those awful people, the murderers and robbers and all the others. And confinement, that would even be worse. John has always been a mild claustrophobic. He's never been able to sleep without the bedroom door open and he refuses to ride in elevators. He'll be an absolute bundle of neuroses when he gets out."

"Well, let's hope we'll have him out of county jail before he's even transferred."

"But you can't promise anything, can you, Mr. Siderman?"

"No," he told her. "I can't."

The glass fitters arrived at ten a.m. and were gone by ten-thirty. While they were working, Siderman placed a toll call to the Driver's License Division of the Department of Licensing. He was owed a favor and now seemed like a good time to collect on it. He needed some driver's license information, he said, on men with two distinctly unusual last names whose birthdates were after 1950. Siderman waited on the line ten minutes while a computer was fed. It delivered data on only one name. The name did not come as a surprise to Siderman. And neither did the information.

BY ELEVEN O'CLOCK HE WAS DOWNTOWN AND ON A HUNCH entered the basement garage of the Public Safety Building unseen. From its license plate he found the car he wanted and did what he knew he had to do. Vincent DiBiase had been careless.

Upstairs in the Assault/Rape Division, DiBiasi couldn't entirely hide his irritation at Siderman's continuing bird-dogging.

"Siderman, for a guy who's been getting most of his stories from the booking sheets the last twenty years, your sudden interest in the inner workings of the division is perplexing."

"I need a minor favor," Siderman said. "In lieu of getting an order from the court."

"Is that a threat, Siderman?"

"Let's just say you're dealing with a man with options."

The detective spent a moment staring the reporter down, perhaps thinking he stood to gain or lose a great deal by his decision.

"Ask your favor, Siderman."

"I'd like to take a look at some rape investigations. Just the preliminary reports. The who, what, when, where and why."

"Just the Offense Reports," the detective said, with a faint lift of his bushy eyebrows. "Well, since it will take a man eight hours to separate

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the preliminaries from the rest of the collected data, we'll just pull the files and sit you down at a desk. How far back into the archives do you wish us to go?"

"Eight months should be far enough," Siderman answered. "About how many reported rapes or attmepted rapes would that include?"

"Roughly two hundred, Siderman. We're a very amorous city. Take that desk back in the corner there and I'll have the files pulled."

That DiBiasi was not showing more anxiety disappointed Siderman, but police detectives were good at hiding their emotions. Then, too, most cases of rape usually dead-ended themselves very quickly for lack of suspects, witnesses and hard evidence. But it was a weak trump card Vince DiBiasi was holding.

A detective brought in the files and placed them on the desk in front of Siderman in two one-foot stacks.

"They go back to August of last year," the detective told him. "The assaults are mixed in with the rapes, so check the Crime Classification Section of the Offense Report if you're shooting for one or the other."

Siderman nodded. Then he removed his suitcoat, loosened his necktie, pulled down the topmost file from the left stack of manila folders and set to work.

To save time and eye-sight, he concentrated only upon rape cases, the physical description of the suspects in each case and the description of the vehicle where one was involved. He also paid attention to the location of each rape scene, keeping alert for locations which would seem to bear some relationship to the scene of the rape for which John Gideon had been convicted. As he read, he was struck surprised by the large number of rapes and assaults involving wives and their husbands and female employees and their male employers. He had always felt rape was an act done by one stranger to another, yet fully two-thirds of the offense forms named as principals those who were work associates, relatives or close friends. The day you didn't learn something new was the day you didn't get up.

Siderman missed lunch. His emersion in the Offense Reports was so total, he did not push back from his work until the last folder of the left-hand stack was closed and pushed aside. The symmetry of having one pile completed and one remaining caused him to stop, stretch and look around the room. A detective sat at one desk interviewing a young female who looked on the verge of crying. At another desk, another detective was issuing what appeared to be a stern lecture to a man and woman, who intermittently threw each other looks of menace. Vince DiBiasi was not at his desk, but his sports jacket was still draped across the back of his chair.

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Siderman walked out into a hallway and found a row of vending machines. He bought two packages of peanut butter cups, an apple and a half-pint of milk. He wolfed it all down at his desk and then broke the ice of the single remaining stack of files. It was a little after three p.m. He had been at it over four hours.

He found his rhythm again, but still the case files refused to associate themselves with John Gideon.

Until the tenth file of the right-hand stack.

THE CASE OF RAPE WAS EASILY FIVE MONTHS OLD. IT HAD taken place south of the city, on Southwest 189th Street, on a street of abandoned houses on Airport Authority property. The rape for which John Gideon had been arrested, tried and convicted had occurred on Southwest 186th Street, a scant three blocks north of the incident Siderman now stared at on a sheet of paper, case number A/R 877-80, the 877th reported incident of assault or rape of the previous calendar year.

Siderman's heart-rate began to increase as he ran his eye down the left-hand margin for the report's section listings. His eyes halted at the section titled SUSPECTS, its sub-sections titled S-1, S-2, and S-3, each box reserved for the description of a numbered suspect up to a total of three.

Only one sub-section, the one titled S-1, was filled in, for a lone suspect in a single incident of rape. He was described by the victim as a white male, aged 25-30, whose height was 5-10 and approximate weight was 170 pounds. He had dark brown or black hair and a short, dark beard. His eyes were brown and his complexion was described as fair.

The sub-section also included a box titled CLOTHING. In it was written. "Tan suit with matching vest."

That he would find listed in the VEHICLE Section an '81 compact car was merely an academic exercise. There it was, a 1981 Chevette. With velvet bucket seats. And then something that *was not mentioned* in the Offense Report which eventually implicated John Gideon: a small air-freshener in the shape of a fir tree dangling from the car's rear-view mirror above the dashboard. Siderman had already seen Gideon's car in the Impound Garage. No such air-freshener was hanging from its rear-view mirror.

Siderman closed the file as riddles began to surface in his mind. If John Gideon was purposely being railroaded into prison, then this case folder marked A/R 877-80 most certainly would have come up in the light of day to exonerate Gideon. But the file's surfacing wasn't

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allowed to happen. Why, then, hadn't the file beem removed *altogether*? Why leave it available for someone like Siderman to stumble upon? Was there a connection between Ed Wintermute, Vince DiBiasi and a young man now convicted of the crime of rape? And if so, what could that connection possibly be?

VINCE DIBIASI WAS BACK AT HIS DESK. THEIR EYES CAUGHT and hooked. Siderman smiled at him and the detective smiled back and then dropped his head back to his paperwork.

Still, the presence of the file haunted Siderman. If there was a conspiracy, then the file *shouldn't be there!* But it *was* there! So how had someone come to make such an incredible blunder?

And then Siderman had it. *Of course* the file had not been discovered. Because no one had been *looking for it!* Because no one even *knew* it was there!

When their eyes met again, Siderman motioned the detective to come over. DiBiasi Nodded, pushed back from his desk and rose. He came slowly down the room and sat in the chair set along side the desk, the interrogation chair. The detective didn't seem all that comfortable in it, either.

"Find something, Siderman?"

"Yes," said Siderman in an empty tone. "But first, let me tell you a story."

The detective lit a small, thin cigar. "A story? I love stories, Siderman. And reporters are such good storytellers, so this should be good. Let's hear it."

"Once upon a time," Siderman began, without malice or theatrics, "let us say roughly six weeks ago, a city detective was assigned to a case of rape. He investigates the crime scene and subsequently fills out an Offense Report according to the statements of the victim.

"For several weeks there appears to be no movement on the case and no suspects. Indeed, the case does not appear to be worked at all. Then quite suddenly, a suspect turns up, a young male who appears to fit all the criteria for arrest. He is arrested forthwith. Procedure is followed to the letter. The evidence gathered against him, while extremely circumstantial, nevertheless carries enough weight to prosecute. The suspect's prosecution is successful, with the sentencing phase remaining and the investigation goes down in the books as a solved case. The investigating detective is commended for his work by his chief and the prosecutor is likewise commended by his superior. All in all, it is a seemingly well-handled matter at every level, from beginning to end."

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DiBiasi was shifting in his seat uneasily. His eyes were averting the reporter's.

Siderman saw that no genuine purpose would be served now by prolonging the fall of the blade.

"Lieutenant DiBiasi," Siderman said evenly and with compassion, "You have a son, don't you? Be warned that I've done some checking on driver's license data. You have a son and Ed Wintermute has a single daughter, Patricia Maria, and no other children."

"Yes. I have a son."

"His name is Victor, isn't it."

"Yes." The detective's eyes were wandering now, in a desparate attempt not to make contact with Siderman's. "His name is Victor."

"You'll forgive me, lieutenant, but I've done some checking. The car he owns is a 1981 Chevette, isn't it?"

"Well, I don't keep track of Vic all that much. He doesn't live at home. And kids are always buying cars, or trading them in."

"The physical description on his driver's license matches the description given by the rapist's victim," Siderman said.

"It does? Well, that's a very *general* description. It probably fits hundreds of young men in Vic's age-group."

"Lieutenant, your son owns a 1981 Chevette, doesn't he?"

"Yes," came the begrudging voice.

"With a temporary license sticker? New cars bought in the same month usually bear similar serial numbers — 661-6777, 661-767, 661-676. The victim was shown John Gideon's license plate number in court, a rear-window sticker number and she testified it was very similar to the rapist's temporary sticker number. *Similar,* Lt. DiBiasi."

The detective seemed immobilized. The ash of his cigar was over an inch long.

"Lieutenant, does your son own a tan suit with a matching vest?"

"A tan suit? Kids' clothes these days. Who knows? I mean, the fads are always changing. One week it's cowboy gear and the next it's preppie, or leather, or beach-bum sloppy."

Siderman waited patiently for the detective's rambling discourse to fade.

Then . . .

"Yes. He has a tan suit. And a matching vest."

"And his height is around 5-10? Weight about 170 pounds? And he has dark brown hair and a closely cropped beard?"

The detective nodded, his head bowed in shame.

"You found John Gideon, didn't you?" Siderman said. "Somehow, some way — through luck or sheer happenstance — your paths crossed

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after the rape. You may even have discovered he went to visit his parents every Thursday night. But in any event, there he was, the almost perfect stand-in for your son, whose guilt you had been suppressing for weeks when the movement in the case was at a dead-stop. It was likely an incredibility you could scarcely believe. A young man who was roughly the same age, height and weight as your son. With the same dark brown beard. And wonder of wonders, he owned an automobile that was the same make, style and year as the one owned by your son, Victor."

Vince DiBiasi had the look of a drained man. His face was the color of pastry dough and his eyes mirrored a mind that was fatigued and beaten.

"From that point on," Siderman continued, "it was nothing more than a matter of leading the victim towards the end you wanted served: the arrest of John Gideon and thereby the absolution you wished for your son. Time was on your side of the fence. The rape was far into history and the victim's memory no longer crystal clear. And you had a suspect who could virtually *pass for* your son. And you doctored the photo montage, just to make doubly certain John Gideon's photo was the one the victim picked out."

"I love my son," the detective said weakly now. "I don't love what he did. But I love my son."

Siderman didn't much like the notion of dropping bombshells upon already beleaguered cities; but a mission was a mission and there were objectives to be reached.

"Lieutenant, were you aware your son came close to being a suspect in a *previous* rape?"

The detective twitched with a sudden shock. For a moment the eyes came alive, but they were confused, as though they were searching in a confused way for something they had lost but could not find.

"*Of course,* you weren't aware of that. The rape happened in October of last year. And you weren't *with* this division then, were you?"

DiBiasi was still in a state of confusion. To bring him up out of it, Siderman opened the file folder and centered it on the desk beneath his eyes.

"How do I know you weren't with this-division last October? Because the Offense Report on that rape was still in your files, the one you're reading now. It puzzled me why the report should still be there, until it dawned on me that possibly you *didn't know* it was there. Because it involved an investigation which took place before you arrived. You might have turned it up if you'd checked the prior arrest

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files, or these active Offense Reports. But you didn't. Because you *already had* your suspect. John Gideon. And since his arrest and conviction were being orchestrated, the *last thing* you wanted was another qualified suspect."

It had been a major blunder and DiBiasi's face showed it as he read the Offense Report he never found. Shame and relief began to fill his face.

"Lieutenant DiBiasi," said Siderman now, moving to fill in the final puzzle piece, "what is your wife's maiden name?"

"You put two-and-two together there, too, didn't you, Siderman?"

"Yes, I'm afraid I did. It's Wintermute, isn't it?"

DiBiasi nodded slowly once again.

"Your wife is Ed Wintermute's sister. Which makes your son his nephew. It's no wonder Ed Wintermute gave John Gideon less than a stalwart defense. The continued freedom of his nephew and your son depended upon it."

DiBiasi stubbed out his cigar in an ash tray. He wiped the build of perspiration from his face and then coughed once to regain his composure.

"All right, Siderman. So what's next?"

"You'll make me a copy of the Offense Report," Siderman told him. "Just in case it actually *does* become misplaced or lost. Then, you'll take it to the chief criminal prosecutor, or one of his deputies. It will be their decision whether to appeal Judge McCombe's ruling of a fair trial, dismiss the charge against John Gideon, or to take Gideon to trial a second time."

"My son will have to be arrested, of course," said the detective, his quiet tone indicating he was resigned to that course now.

"You'll do what *you* have to do. And I'll do what *I* have to do. We both know John Gideon is innocent. And sooner or later, the public deserves to know it, too."

DiBiasi nodded and rose. "I'll get you a copy of this," he told Siderman. "Shouldn't take but a few minutes."

IN THE DETECTIVE'S ABSENCE, SIDERMAN REFLECTED UPON all these developments for a purely selfish, professional standpoint. Had he leapt into the John Gideon arrest from the very outset, he might now have placed himself into the running for a Pulitzer. But he hadn't and so he wouldn't be losing much sleep over being visited by the Pulitzer nominating committee. But then again, John Gideon would not be headed for prison, either. And that was a trade-off he could live with very easily.

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It was not long before Vince DiBiasi returned with Siderman's copy of the Offense Report. Siderman folded it and slipped it into a pocket and as he did, his fingertips brushed the final puzzle piece.

He brought out the shell casing and handed it to the detective. "I think this belongs to you. I got the license number of your private car from the Department of Motor Vehicles. You drove *down* Dulanney Street last night, which meant you had to fire across the passenger seat through an open window."

"I didn't get all the casings," said DiBiasi, needlessly.

"It was wedged between the seats."

DiBiasi jiggled the shell casing in his palm. "You plan to make anything out of this?"

"I don't think so," Siderman told him. "You'll have to arrest your own son, explain why this Offense Report wasn't located and perhaps even face charges of an improper investigation. That strikes me as enough trouble for any single human being to face. But I *am* going to bill you for a pane of glass, plus labor."

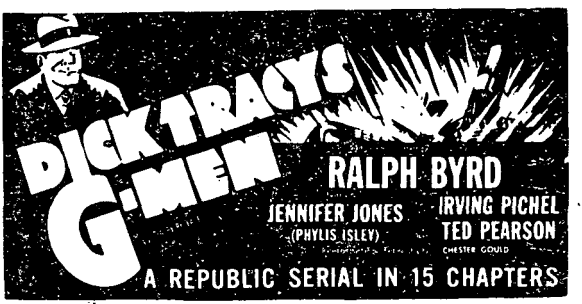
"Where will you be when the deputy prosecutor reaches a decision?" DiBiasi asked the reporter.

"Where am I *always*?" Siderman told him. "In the reporters' room downstairs. I'll wait until ten p.m., then I'll have to go with what I know and what I suspect. Is that fair?"

"Fair," the detective told him. "I suppose you'll want to be the one to tell John Gideon. And his parents."

"I'd appreciate that," Siderman said. "I've blown a Pulitzer through neglect and deadened instincts and just plain laziness. So this appears to be the next best satisfaction."

Neither man could argue that. ●



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Major Clifford Lansing of the CID was going back to America — but it was a sad homecoming for him. This time he was going to investigate the murder of his father!

Million Dollar Murder

by W.L. FIELDHOUSE

WHY DIDN'T I COME HOME SOONER? MAJOR CLIFFORD Lansing thought solemnly as the 747 touched down on the runway of the Detroit International Airport.

Lansing knew the answer. He'd been too involved with his job as a homicide investigator in the Criminal Investigation Department of USAEUR. Lansing hadn't left West Germany since 1978, and he hadn't had a vacation or an exended leave during that time. Once he'd taken a three day pass to Bonn to visit an old jump buddy from the days when Lansing was an Airborne Ranger in Vietnam. Even then, he'd encountered another homicide and another investigation.

Now, for the first time in four years, he had returned to America — on an emergency leave for personal reasons. Once again, a murder was involved.

He stared out the window of the plane and thought how all airports look alike just about anywhere in the world. This time he wasn't being assigned to a case. Lansing was a military investigator and he had no authority in the civilian world. He had come to attend a funeral and visit his family . . . .

At least that's what he'd told General Clayton before he left.

DETECTIVE CAPTAIN ROBERT WINFIELD RECOGNIZED Lansing immediately. His tall, lean figure, dressed in a Class A, green dress uniform with polished brass buttons and a gold oakleaf on each

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shoulder, stood out among the other passengers that deplaned from Flight 177. But Winfield would have known him anyway. Major Lansing looked like his father had twenty years ago.

"Cliff?" he called out.

Lansing emerged from the crowd. "Good to see you, Bob," he said, taking the other man's hand. "It's been a long time."

"Yeah," Winfield, a stocky, balding man with a pleasant round face, replied. They shook hands warmly. "I'm sorry about what happened."

The major nodded. "When's the funeral?"

"In three days," the cop said as they walked through the corridor toward the baggage department. "Your Aunt Glenda handled the arrangements. She wanted to give you and your brother enough time to get here. Dave's an insurance salesman in San Diego, you know."

"No, I didn't," Lansing admitted. "Dave and I haven't stayed in touch much."

"My car's in the lot. Traffic shouldn't be too heavy if we hurry."

"How did it happen, Bob?" Lansing asked.

Winfield sighed. "A goddamn burglar broke into your Dad's house. The son of a bitch must have been going through the dresser drawers in the bedroom. When John woke up, the bastard let him have it with a .357 Magnum. The medical examiner says your father was dead almost as soon as the bullets hit him. It was quick, Cliff."

"Did you catch the killer?"

"Not yet. But we will. We've got a list of the stuff he took and sooner or later it'll show up in a pawnshop or someplace like that. We'll get him."

Major Lansing merely nodded in reply.

"Your father was awful proud of you, Cliff," Winfield said. "Whenever I was over at John's house, he showed me the scrap book with your pictures in it. He had all the newspaper clippings from *The Stars and Stripes* and *The Overseas Weekly* that told about all those homicides you've solved over in Europe. Really proud, Cliff."

Lansing wiped a hand under his moist eyes. "We'd better go," he said softly.

THE LATE JOHN C. LANSING HAD RETIRED FROM THE DETROIT Police Department and lived the remaining years of his life at a small house in the town of Lottsville. It was the same house in which Clifford and David Lansing had been raised. Memories flooded the major's mind and heart as he stepped across the threshold. He recalled his mother, who'd died in a car accident when he was eleven. He remem-

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bered watching his father strap on a gun before he left for work and wondering if he'd be an orphan the next day. Lansing remembered how happy John C. had been when he joined the force and how upset he'd been when Lansing decided to resign and enlist into the U.S. Army.

"Hello, Cliff," a voice only vaguely familiar with the passing of time, greeted in a tone void of emotion.

A figure dressed in a conservative blue suit with a striped tie stood in the front room. He wasn't as tall as the major and his middle revealed a slight bulge from inactivity in middle-age. His dark brown hair was longer than Lansing's and it hadn't grayed at the temples.

"David," Clifford Lansing replied. He held out a hand. "How have you been?"

"Just selling insurance," his brother replied, shaking hands without enthusiasm. "Haven't caught a single killer yet."

"Everybody can't be a cop," Lansing smiled.

"Father would say every *Lansing* should be one," the younger man said dryly. "I'm glad you got the telegram Aunt Glenda sent you. It's only right you should attend the funeral since you were his favorite son."

"David . . ."

"I suppose it doesn't matter now." David shook his head. "It's ironic. Thirty years with the department and he never got a scratch. Then some punk burglarizes the place and blows him away."

"A punk with a .357 Magnum," Lansing commented. "That's an expensive and good quality weapon."

"I wouldn't know," his brother said. "I never shared your fondness for guns and karate or playing cops and robbers, Cliff."

"Everybody has his own interests," the major said. "How are Carol and the kids doing?"

"Okay," David answered. "Do you still like being in the Army?"

"I like my MOS — Military Occupational Speciality. I guess that's the same thing," Lansing replied. "How about you?"

"The insurance business is nice steady work, but sales is dog eat dog — even if nobody's shooting at you. At least we don't have the godawful winters in San Diego we used to have here. I suppose Germany gets pretty cold."

"It has its moments," Lansing admitted. "How long will you be here?"

"I've got a plane back to California the night after the funeral."

"We *will* get together before you leave, won't we?" Lansing asked hopefully.

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"If you like," David said. "I'm staying at Glenda's place. She let me borrow her car. Do you need a lift?"

"No, thanks," the major replied. "I've rented the yellow Volkswagen Rabbit parked at the curb."

"Let me know where you're staying," David said as he walked to the door.

LANSING WATCHED HIS BROTHER LEAVE. IT HAD BEEN nearly six years since they'd last seen each other. *We sound like casual acquaintances who happened to meet in a supermarket,* Lansing thought. *Certainly, after all this time, we should have more to talk about.*

But he had no idea what that might be.

Then his eyes fell on the china closet in the dining room. The antique dinnerware his grandmother had given John Lansing on his wedding day was still there. He opened a drawer beneath the glass top. A genuine set of Sterling silverware gleamed back at him. Lansing slammed the drawer angrily.

He entered his father's office and strode to a small metal desk by the window. Lansing jerked open the center drawer and saw a rat's nest of papers within. He shut it and opened the others. A snubnosed .38 caliber Smith & Wesson revolver was in one drawer. A box of shells and a belt holster for the gun were in another. Lansing noticed three framed photographs on the desktop — his mother, he and David as children and a picture of Major Lansing in uniform. He hoped his brother hadn't seen the pictures too.

Next, he inspected the drawers of a filing cabinet. He extracted a manilla folder and opened it to read a surveillance report about an individual suspected of arson. The investigation discovered he'd been hired by an unsuccessful business man who'd had his own store torched to collect the insurance. The folder was marked ELLISON CASE: CLOSED JULY 10, 1981.

Lansing found other records of similiar investigations up to January 1982. He shoved the last drawer shut. *You were still at it, Father,* he thought. *You'd been a cop too long to give it up.*

"Is that why somebody killed you?" he wondered aloud.

CAPTAIN WINFIELD LOOKED UP FROM HIS DESK WITH SURprise when Major Lansing entered his office at the 63rd Precinct of the Detroit Police Department. Lansing wore civilian slacks and shirt with a dark green Army windbreaker, yet his expression was anything but casual.

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"What do you know about my father's activities after he left the force," he asked, his tone almost issuing a command.

"I was afraid you'd find out about that, Cliff," Winfield sighed, leaning back in his chair.

"He was doing investigations for private companies, wasn't he?"

"From time to time," the detective said. "He couldn't get it out of his blood. Sixty-three-years-old and still had to keep tracking down the bad guys. Hell, I'm ready to retire tomorrow and sit on my ass for the rest of my life. But *you* wouldn't understand that. You'll be just like John when you get to be his age."

"He must have stayed in touch with the department," Lansing said. "What sort of information was he asking about?"

"Cliff," Winfield began helplessly, "your father didn't tell you or Dave he'd turned P.I. because he figured you'd worry. He asked me not to mention it to you in my letters."

"I'll find out one way or the other, Bob," the major told him. "I used to be with the department myself, remember? You can tell me now or I'll dig around until I get the answers later."

"You Lansings are the most hard-headed bastards I ever met," Winfield said wearily. "Okay. John had quite a reputation as an investigator in Michigan, just as you've got to be a living legend in USAEUR. He handled cases for insurance companies, worked with private security outfits, did a few jobs for industrial companies and for various firms, large and small."

"Was he working on anything after January?"

"He'd asked for data the department had on a local low-life named Harrison Carter."

"That sounds familiar," Lansing frowned. "Didn't Father bust Carter back in 1975 for receiving stolen goods?"

"That's right," the cop answered. "Carter was a small-time fence here in Detroit. The judge gave him a five-to-ten sentence and he served four years in the joint before they released him for good behavior. I guess that's not too bad considering how easy they go on some of these clowns nowadays. Anyway, since '79 he's been struggling along at various business ventures. None of them have done very well, but as far as we can tell, he's kept his nose criminally clean. In 1981, Carter and another ex-con named Mike Sumter (who has a record for assault and battery) opened a shop that specializes in novelty items. They keep buying hula-hoops and skateboards by the gross, hoping they'll hit a big fad and make a fortune. Right now, it looks like they're heading for the financial toilet again."

"They're still in the city?"

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"You can find them in the yellow pages if you've got a magnifying glass."

"Was Dad interested in anybody else?"

"An old acquaintance of your's, Cliff. Remember Fred Minton?"

Lansing grimaced. "Badge for sale. The whole department knew he was on the take, but nobody could prove anything. It was a lot of fun to work a stake-out with a guy when you knew there was a fifty-fifty chance he was on the pay roll of the crooks. Did you ever nail that son of a bitch?"

"No such luck," The cop frowned. "But we sort of 'encouraged' him to resign a couple of years ago. He hired on to three security guard jobs and got fired from all of them. Drinking on duty twice and once for 'unbecoming behavior.' But Minton doesn't have to worry about that anymore. He's self-employed and the skipper of his very own ship — a garbage scow up at Lexington Harbor."

"Thanks for the information, Bob," Lansing said.

"Cliff, neither of those two were ever into anything big — and it would have to be real *big* to make it worthwhile for somebody to have John C. Lansing killed. Half the department is trying to find the man who did it and the other half is standing in line for their turn at bat. A lousy burglar did it — not a washed-up fence or a has-been cop."

"You're probably right," Lansing agreed, heading for the door.

"*Cliff*," Winfield said sharply. "I don't have to remind you that you aren't in Germany working for the CID, do I? You don't have any authority in Detroit. You aren't a civilian cop anymore and you're not Clint Eastwood riding off for revenge in the movies. Don't forget that."

"I won't," the major assured him. "I'm just plain old Clifford Lansing."

He left the office and closed the door.

"Yeah," Winfield sighed. "John Lansing's son."

THE LEGEND *CARTER'S NOVELTIES* HAD BEEN PAINTED WITH cheap red paint that had been partially worn by exposure to weather an and no one had bothered to touch up the letters. The sign above the small shop on the corner of Maple and Prescott Street was barely legible. Major Lansing parked the VW Rabbit on the curb and entered the building. Shelves with rubber spiders, magic tricks, "whoopie" cushions, squirting flowers and other trinkets, lined the walls.

Lansing found no one in the front room, so he moved to a side door that led to a combination garage/storage area. Boxes labeled "hula-hoops" and "frisbees" were stacked in the corners. A tractor-trailer

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rig had backed into the garage. Two men inspected the open rear of the truck. Lansing strolled closer and gazed inside to see the rig was literally stuffed with an enormous pile of thick netting.

"What the hell?" a short, shapr-faced man with a cigar-stub in his wide mouth exclaimed with alarm when he noticed the major. "Who are you and what do you want?"

"I'm doing a survey on why businessmen fail," Lansing replied. "From what I hear, you're an excellent reference source, Carter."

"Want me to throw this smart ass out, Harry?" the other man, a wide-faced black with a build like a mail box, inquired.

"Take it easy, Mike," Carter replied. "I want to give him one more chance to answer my question."

"My name's Clifford Lansing and I want to have a chat with you about your current efforts to give the free enterprise system a bad name."

"Lansing, eh?" Carter scratched his pointy jaw. "Must be related to Big John C. Sorry to hear he got wasted, but he made a lot of enemies."

"Including you?"

"What?" the ex-con snorted with disgust. "You figure I'd wanta blast him 'cause he sent me to the joint a few years ago? Hell, fella. He was a cop. That was part of his job. You don't hold somethin' like that against a guy."

"Father didn't tell me you two exchanged Christmas cards."

"Look," Carter removed the cigar stump and used it to point at the truck. "I'm a legitimate businessman. See? I got me about a ton of hammocks. It's gonna be a big thing this year."

"How can anyone get along without one," Lansing commented dryly. "Considering your track record, I'm surprised you can afford that eighteen wheeler."

"We manage, Lansing," Mike Sumter stated with a surly stare. "I've driven it all over the country to get the best quality material available for our shop."

"Things must be looking up for you two high-rollers," the major smiled. "Or maybe you've got another source of income the IRS doesn't know about."

"You're lucky I'm on parole, punk," Mike hissed. "Otherwise, I'd bash your teeth in for that remark."

"Shut up, Mike," Carter said flatly. "This guy's trying to dig up some dirt on us. Don't hand him a goddamn shovel."

"What sort of dirt might I find if I looked?" Lansing inquired. "The same thing my father was investigating?"

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"I thought your old man retired a while back."

"You didn't know he still worked private investigations?"

"You're joking," Carter snorted. "He musta been old enough to collect social security, for crissake."

"He was interested in your activities, Carter. Why?"

"Seems to me I recall one of Old Man Lansing's brats used to be a cop before he got a patriotic hair up his ass and decided to join the Army," Carter smiled. "You know what I think? I think you're that tin soldier and that means I don't have to tell you a damn thing."

"You heard the man," Mike snarled. "You ain't got no business here. Get out before *we* call the cops!"

"I wouldn't want to make you do anything contrary to your nature," Lansing replied dryly.

CAREFULLY, MAJOR LANSING TURNED THE STEEL NEEDLE IN the keyhole. He'd studied lock-picking from a former burglar who'd become the CID's top advisor on the subject of breaking and entry. Lansing had used his ability on more than one occasion, although he'd never thought he'd be breaking into his own father's home.

A dull click rewarded his efforts. Lansing turned the knob and opened the door. He entered the dark house, carrying a penlight in one hand and a brief case in the other. Flicking on the penlight, he cast the narrow beam across the interior until he found the office. Moving to the desk, he opened the center drawer and examined the papers with the diminutive light.

They were Xerox copies of newspaper and magazine articles. Although the publications varied, the subject remained the same. The articles concerned the American tuna boats that were seized by the Mexican coast guard south of Baja California in 1980 and 1981.

Lansing frowned. There didn't seem to be any possibility the material could have any connection with a case his father was involved with in Detroit. However, after years of investigative work, Lansing had learned crimes were solved by deductions based on facts, not assumptions. He placed the Xerox copies in his brief case.

The sudden harsh ring of the telephone on the desk forced a gasp from the major. He hesitated for a moment, then decided he'd overdone the clandestine nature of inspecting his father's house. After all, no one had denied him access to his former home. He picked up the receiver.

"Lansing?" a man's voice asked anxiously.

"Yes," he replied.

"I found out where they got them from," the voice declared. "San

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Diego! Almost two million dollars worth!"

"What is it and who has it?" the major asked urgently.

"Huh?" the man paused. "You ain't Lansing!"

"Wait!" the investigator urged. "I'm John Lansing's — "

A sharp *clang* filled his ear, followed by a mournful whine. The mysterious caller had hung up.

Lansing cursed himself for handling the man too abruptly. He replaced the receiver in the cradle of the phone and opened the side drawers of the desk. After putting his father's S&W revolver, holster and box of .38 cartridges in the brief case, he closed it.

DAVID LANSING ENTERED THE COFFEE SHOP AND LOCATED his brother seated at a booth by the front window. He slid into the seat facing the major.

"Maybe six in the morning isn't early for you guys in the Army, but I've barely got my eyes open," David complained.

"Sorry," Lansing replied, looking down at his coffee cup. "This can't wait."

"That's what you said on the phone," the younger man nodded. "Now, what the hell did you want to talk to me about that couldn't wait until nine o'clock and you can't discuss in front of Aunt Glenda?"

Lansing glanced about the shop, looking at the plastic topped counter and the sad-faced woman behind it. A grill heated frozen sausage for another customer's breakfast and glass pots of oily coffee sat on hotplates behind a case of doughnuts that had been removed from a box the night before.

"Do you remember when this place used to be an ice cream parlor?" the major mused. "We used to come here on the weekends when we were kids. We used to be pretty close once. What happened to us, Dave?"

"We grew up," his brother replied flatly. "We became different kinds of people with different interests."

Lansing looked at him. "Because we're different means we can't feel any closeness? Any love?"

"Jesus, Cliff," David muttered. "You didn't get me down here to tell me that, did you?"

"No," the major admitted. "I didn't."

He told David about their father's private investigation work. "I don't believe Dad was killed by a burglar. A .357 Magnum isn't the sort of weapon the average sneakthief carries. It's a professional hitter's gun or a cop's. I used to carry one when I was with the department."

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"Maybe the burglar didn't read the right crime magazines to know what he was supposed to take with him on the job," David snorted.

"Our father was murdered," Lansing said sharply. "And you don't seem to give a damn!"

"Of course I do," David snapped. "But I also remember when we were kids that we always knew he'd probably die violently. We learned to accept that. It was part of being a cop's son. Right? I figure that's why you've never been married, Cliff. Because you don't want to put your wife and children through that same mess."

"I can't accept murder, Dave," the senior brother insisted. "Especially father's. The killer didn't touch a three thousand dollar silver set in the dining room, but he ripped off a gold plated watch the department gave Dad when he retired. Does that make sense to you? I also suspect he removed some files from Father's office. Dad had been investigating a couple of shady characters and there isn't anything about them in his records."

"Cliff," David sighed, "you're only going to be here for three days before you have to go back to Germany . . ."

"I'm not leaving until I've found Father's killer," the major said. "Last night I was going through his desk for clues when the phone rang. A man on the other end of the line said he'd discovered "they'd gotten something worth almost two million dollars from San Diego."

"Who was he? What was he talking about?

"I don't know. He hung up before I could get any answers, but I suspect he was one of Dad's connections. A good cop makes a lot of contacts in a lot of different areas. Quite a few of them are involved in illegal deals themselves and they're terrified of exposure. Unfortunately, I scared him off."

"Have you gone to the police with this information?" David clucked his tongue with disgust. "Of course you haven't. You want to solve this yourself, don't you?"

"I don't have any solid evidence to give to the police yet," Lansing explained. "How much contact did you have with Father?"

"Not much." The younger man shrugged. "He called once a year to wish Carol and the kids Merry Christmas. At least I gave him grandchildren, huh? Oh, and he never forgot to send a birthday card to anyone in the family." David's brow knitted. "Come to think of it, he called about two weeks ago to ask if my insurance firm had any branches in Canada."

"Canada?"

"Yeah." David shrugged again. "I told him we didn't and I asked why he was interested. He said he wanted to get a contact up there.

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Then he added that he might 'decide to do a little fishing' and hung up."

"That's it?"

David nodded. Then his expression stiffened as he stared hard at Lansing. "You're thinking that I'm from San Diego and the caller mentioned it too. You suspect *I* might have something to do with Father's death, don't you?"

"I didn't say that, David."

"You didn't have to," the younger man hissed angrily. He rose from his seat. "See you at the funeral, *brother*."

Lansing watched his brother storm out of the shop. He wanted to call him back and assure him that he believed in his innocence, but he couldn't

David was right.

Major Lansing *did* suspect his own brother.

GULLS SOARED ABOVE LAKE HURON AS LANSING PARKED THE Volkswagen Rabbit near the Lexington Harbor. He walked along the pier, glancing at a craft, similar to a small Princess Ship, that cruised along the blue-green water. Most of the boats were in dock — small, professional rigs that performed unromantic and often unpleasant tasks. A vile stench assualted his nostrils as he approached a tin roofed building. The smoke stack of a diesel-engine jutted from the cabin of a diminutive flatboat docked beside the stucture. Dead fish, rotten vegetables and organic garbage was piled on the dreary little craft.

Two large, muscle bound men shoveled the foul conglomeration from the pile and dumped it into large metal barrels. A third man, only slightly smaller than his workers, supervised the chore from the pier. Although ten years had passed since Lansing had seen Fred Minton, he recognized the ex-cop immediately. Minton had gained at least twenty pounds and his paunch formed a hump under his Navy blue turtle-neck sweater. A gray-black beard decorated his face and he wore a battered sea captain's cap with a cracked plastic bill.

"If you can't get it all into those four barrels, we've got more in the warehouse," Minton told his laborers. "Don't stuff those things too full or we won't be able to seal the lids on tight."

"We know what we're doin', *Captain*," one of the men, a hard-faced stevedore with a shaggy brown beard, replied gruffly.

"Just make sure you do it right, Sol," Minton growled. "And don't spill any of that crap over the side. The EPA inspectors love to catch petty violations like that."

"My, my," Lansing commented as he strolled closer. "From Flat-

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foot to Captain Bligh. How you've come up in the world, Minton."

The ex-cop turned sharply. A puzzled expression dominated his face until his mind recalled a name to suit the major's face. "Clifford Lansing? Jesus, I thought you'd been killed in Vietnam or something."

"And I thought you would have been jailed for taking bribes from every loan shark and dope-dealer in Detroit," Lansing replied with a sneer. "But I see you still can't help associating with garbage of one kind or another."

"Didn't they teach you any manners in the Army, Lansing?" Minton muttered. "I suppose you came back for your father's funeral. Read about that. Sorry your Dad bought it. He was a good cop."

"I'm surprised you'd recognize one."

"That snotty talk can get you a busted head," the ex-cop warned. "Especially around here. But I can understand you being upset, so just get the hell outta here before I have Jake and Sol tear you apart like a Thanksgiving Day turkey."

"It must feel good to be able to tell somebody what to do after taking orders from hoods for so many years, eh, Fred?"

"You want something, Lansing?" Minton snorted. "Or did you just come here to admire the view?"

"My father was interested in your current occupation," the major replied. "I thought I'd see what you were up to that's so fascinating."

"John C. was looking into my business?" Minton chuckled. "I'm a seafaring garbage man, Lansing. I go all over Lake Huron to pick up fish rejects from nets and slop from the diners and ships' crews. Why would your dad want to know about that?"

"Maybe he suspected you might be hauling around more than one kind of junk."

"Drugs?" Minton smiled. "You know me better than that, Lansing. Look, I'll level with you. Sure I was on the take. With the lousy salaries we got for risking our lives in a zoo like Detroit, who wouldn't be?"

"Any good police officer," Lansing answered.

"An overgrown boy scout like you," Minton scoffed. "But I never got involved deep enough to get caught. I'm not stupid, Lansing — and only an idiot would try to run drugs in a garbage scow. Since the Canadian government is bent outta shape about marijuana coming from the States, the narcotics boys are sniffing around the docks constantly. The goddamn Environmental Protection Agency checks me out any time they feel like it too. Besides, I know the local fuzz were told about my under-the-table deals in Detroit. Lexington's finest are keeping an eye on me as well. No way I'm going to deal in dope, gun-running or anything else."

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"You'll just keep making your living as an honest shipping magnate," Lansing shook his head. "You couldn't stay clean as a cop and I doubt that you've turned over a new leaf, Minton."

"You don't like me," the scow captain frowned. "Well, that just breaks my heart, Lansing. But you haven't been with the police department for a long time. So unless the United States Army wants me for something, you'd better get off my back and keep your mouth shut. There's laws against slander and libel, and I'll sue your ass off if you give me any more trouble."

"Don't be so touchy, Fred," Lansing said. "I won't take up any more of your time. You can get back to your stink now."

THE MOTEL ROOM WAS SMALL AND SPARTANLY FURNISHED, but it served Major Lansing's needs. He closed and locked the door and pulled the drapes before he removed his windbreaker. The snub-nose .38 was holstered high on his right hip. Lansing stripped off his belt to remove the revolver. Tucking the S&W under the pillow on his bed, Lansing placed the briefcase on a desk and popped it open.

A knock at the door drew his attention. "It's me, Cliff," David Lansing's voice announced. "May I come in?"

"Of course," the major replied, unlocking the door for his brother. "I'm glad you came."

"I had to talk to you after I blew my stack today," David explained, entering the room.

"Forget it," Lansing said as he shut the door. "It probably seemed like I was giving you the third degree."

"Father and I weren't very close, Cliff," the younger man admitted. "But I would never have done anything to harm him."

"I don't really know you anymore, Dave," Lansing confessed. "But I don't believe you'd participate in killing our father."

"But the guy on the phone mentioned San Diego and something worth two million dollars," David said, sinking into a chair. "Do you have any idea what he was talking about?"

The major sat on the edge of the bed. "The first things that come to mind are items like heroin, stolen jewels, art objects and such. Harrimon Carter, one of the suspects, used to be a fence in Detroit but he was a small-timer and I doubt he'd be able to handle anything on that level. If he had some big connections, he wouldn't be running a two-bit novelty shop. Besides, both Carter and the other suspect, Minton, are under constant surveillance by the authorities. They'd have to be crazy to smuggle in anything from California that would arouse suspicion."

"I want to help if I can, Cliff," David said.

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"Well," his brother sighed. "I'll tell you what I've got so far — although some of it may have nothing to do with the case."

HE TOLD DAVID WHAT HE KNEW ABOUT THE TWO MAIN suspects and extracted the Xerox copies of the news articles from his brief case. "And I found these in Father's desk."

David frowned as he examined them. "Tuna boats? What the hell could this have . . . Cliff! There are tuna boats along the San Diego coast!"

"Maybe Father wasn't interested in the boats seized by the Mexicans. Perhaps it's something *taken* from vessels still in the States."

"Those big rigs are worth a fortune, Cliff," David replied. "But I don't see how anybody could disassemble a tuna boat and transfer it across the country to Michigan."

"Just a minute, Dave," Lansing began, shuffling through the copies. "Did your insurance company ever do business with the tuna industry?"

"Sure," his brother replied.

"Maybe the thieves didn't have to steal an entire boat to get something worth a fortune," the major mused. He found the article he wanted and gave it to David. "Notice the list of materials taken by the Mexican coast guard when they grabbed the tuna boats?"

"What am I supposed to notice?"

"The 'costly and valuable nets' confiscated."

"Of course!" David snapped his fingers. "They insure those damn things for almost half a million each!"

"If somebody managed to steal four tuna nets, they'd have nearly two million dollars worth," Lansing concluded. "After they transported the nets from the coastal area, they'd run little risk by bringing them to Detroit. Who'd suspect a bunch of nets to be worth that kind of money?"

"But what could Carter do with them?" David asked. "He could hardly sell tuna nets on the street corner. Who'd be willing to pay millions for fish nets in Detroit?"

"What if the buyers aren't in Detroit?" Lansing mused. "Everything makes sense now."

"Not to me," David confessed.

Lansing reached under the pillow and produced the holstered S&W. David gasped as he watched his brother slip on his belt to secure the revolver to his hip.

"Cliff, you can't run around with a gun on!" the younger man

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exclaimed.

"I can't let those bastards get away with murdering our father either," the major replied, counting the extra .38 cartridges before putting them in his pocket.

"You don't have a permit for that thing."

"The hell with a permit," Lansing said flatly.

"Call the police and let them handle it," David urged.

"What will we tell them? We don't know anything for certain. We don't have any proof — yet." The major donned his windbreaker. "And I suspect the evidence is going to disappear soon. There isn't time to waste with department red tape and search warrants."

"Will you at least explain this business to me on our way to where ever the hell we're going?" David asked as he rose from his chair.

"What are you talking about?" Lansing frowned. "You aren't trained to handle investigations or to tangle with criminals."

"I'm going with you, Cliff," his brother insisted. "They killed *our* father, remember?"

"All right," the major agreed reluctantly. "But do exactly what I say and don't take any foolish chances. These guys have already killed once and they won't hesitate to do it again."

THE HEADLIGHTS OF THE TRACTOR-TRAILER RIG SLICED through the fog that surrounded the Lexington Harbor that night. Clifford and David Lansing watched the truck U-turn to back into the pier loading section. Three figures waited for the vehicle.

"Carter's truck," the major told his brother as they hid behind the Octopus Inn near the lot. "And there's Minton and his boys ready to meet it."

Harrimon Carter and Mike Sumter emerged from the tractor and joined the other men at the rear of the truck. They opened it and all five hauled out an enormous bundle of netting from the trailer.

"You guessed right, Cliff," David whispered. "Carter's driver brought the nets from California, claiming they were hammocks. Now he's brought them to Minton."

"Yeah," Lansing rasped. "Then Fred loads the nets on his garbage scow, cruises up Lake Huron to Canada and sells them to his connection up there."

"That's why Dad wanted to know if my company had a Canadian branch."

The major nodded. "He hoped to get in touch with a Canadian insurance investigator. Minton and Carter plan to sell the nets to some shady operators with the Canadian fishing industry. The Maple Leaf

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boys will pay a bundle for the gear and still spend less than they would if they purchased it through a legitimate dealer."

"Those nets are big, Cliff," Dave remarked. "*Real* big. They couldn't haul more that one of them in that truck."

"That means they've either sold one or more to the Canadians or they have the others waiting for pick up with their confederates in California," Lansing said. "Either way, they aren't going to get away with their scheme. Find a telephone and call the police."

"What are you going to do?" his brother demanded.

"I'll make certain those bastards don't leave before the cavalry arrives," the major replied, drawing the .38 from its holster.

"Cliff . . ." David's voice revealed his concern.

"I'll be alright," Lansing assured him. "Go on."

Reluctantly, the younger man left.

MINTON, CARTER AND THEIR THREE HENCHMEN LOADED the net on the deck of the garbage scow. While the boat's skipper showed Carter a map and explained the route they'd take to the Canadian coast, Sol and Jake walked to the warehouse.

"If nobody's going to get wise to us hauling those nets up to Manitoulin Island," Jake growled. "Why do we have to cover them up with dead fish and other crap?"

"No need in takin' chances," the bearded Sol shrugged. "A garbage scow full of garbage don't look like much. So we'll just . . ."

He didn't complete the sentence as he stared at the warehouse. The heavy door had been pushed back.

"You didn't open that sucker, did you?" Sol asked.

Jake shook his head. "It was closed before we went out to the truck. Maybe that black guy with Carter did it."

"And maybe somebody else did," Sol rasped, drawing a long bladed knife from a belt sheath.

"Yeah," the other man agreed. He stared at the shadows within the warehouse as he knelt to pick up a stevedore's hook.

His back was turned to Lansing when the major appeared from the corner of the building. His arm swung quickly and clubbed the walnut butt of the S&W revolver into the mastoid bone behind Jake's ear. The big man fell with a grunt, his hook slipping from his grasp to skid across the floorboards within the warehouse.

Sol glimpsed the tall figure of Clifford Lansing a moment before the major snap-kicked him in the groin. The stevedore gasped in agony and doubled up. Lansing chopped the gun butt into the point of Sol's

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bearded chin and knocked the man unconscious.

Suddenly, a large form sprang from the fog behind Lansing. He whirled as the heavy body collided into him. Both men stumbled across the threshold of the warehouse. A hard fist slammed into the side of Lansing's head. Through a crimson blur, the major saw Mike Sumter's white teeth grind together in concentration amid his ebony face. Sumter twisted the S&W out of the major's grasp.

The gun fell and Sumter's foot sent it sliding outside. Lansing's left hand shot out, slamming the heel of his palm into his opponent's mouth. He broke Sumter's hold and swung a horizontal *empi* blow to the black thug's jaw. The elbow smash knocked Sumter to the floor. One of his hands touched Jake's discarded stevedore hook.

The heavy curved steel lashed out at the major's legs. Lansing jumped out of range as Sumter scrambled to his feet. A murderous gleam filled the hood's eyes. He slashed the hook at his adversary, narrowly missing the agile Major Lansing. When Sumter swung an overhead stroke, Lansing feinted with his hands and quickly launched a karate side-kick to the other man's kneecap.

Cartilage crunched. Sumter screamed as his knee broke at the joint. Lansing grabbed the wrist behind the hook and twisted his opponent's arm. Then he executed another side-kick, the edge of his foot striking the sensitive nerve center located in Sumter's armpit. The thug trembled from the blow, then he slumped senseless to the floor.

LANSING SIGHED WITH RELIEF. THREE DOWN, TWO TO GO. HE stepped from the warehouse. A thickly built shadow stood amid the fog, arms raised, both hands holding a big, black revolver with a ribbed barrel.

The major threw himself forward as the gunman opened fire. Flame spat from the muzzle and the pistol roared. A high velocity bullet splintered wood from the doorframe of the warehouse. Lansing caught a glimpse of Fred Minton's face as the ex-cop's arms rose with the recoil of his revolver.

A .357 Magnum! Lansing thought, scrambling to the discarded .38 that lay between the unconscious forms of Jake and Sol. Minton swung his gun toward the major as Lansing's hand scooped up the snub-nosed revolver.

Lansing rolled across the harbor floorboards and the Magnum exploded a second round. A powerful .357 slug bit into the wooden surface where the major had been a second before. Lansing held the S&W in a two-handed Weaver's grip and fired his father's gun from a prone position. Minton's body weaved as a .38 round struck his chest.

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Lansing squeezed off two more shots and his father's murderer crashed to the pier — dead.

Aware the shots would alert Harrimon Carter, Lansing moved on, the S&W held ready. He didn't know if Carter was still on board the scow, or if the man was armed, but the boat was the logical place to look for him. As he approached the edge of the dock, the major saw two figures struggling on the deck of the garbage scow.

Due to the dense fog, he didn't recognize Carter's opponent until he drew closer. David Lansing threw a punch at the Detroit crook, who ducked under it and rammed a fist into the other man's stomach. Carter's appearance belied his toughness. He'd learned more than one trick about dirty fighting while he'd been in prison. Grabbing David's forelock, he slammed a hard upper-cut to the taller man's face.

David staggered backward as Carter launched another punch. The fist bounced off David's shoulder and he countered with a blow under the thug's ribs. Carter folded at the middle and David whipped a knee into his face. The ex-con stumbled back into the rail. David hit him again. The blow knocked Carter over the rail. With a scream, the man fell overboard. A great splash announced his arrival at the water below.

David Lansing walked unsteadily from the boat to join his brother. "You get the rest of them?" he asked breathlessly.

"As soon as we fish Carter out of the drink we'll have them all," the major replied. "I thought I told you to call the police?"

"I did," David grinned. "But you didn't say what I should do afterward. And I think I did pretty well for an insurance salesman."

"Not bad at all," Lansing agreed. "Now we'll just have to hold these guys until the cops arrive and explain the situation to them."

"*You'll* have some explaining to do," the younger man sighed. "Especially about that gun."

"I'll worry about that when the time comes," Lansing said. "What matters now is the fact we caught the men who murdered our father."

"Yeah," David agreed. "You know, for the first time in my life I feel like a *real* Lansing," he smiled. "I finally caught a killer." ●

NEXT MONTH

Mike Shayne returns in another thrilling adventure!

Don't miss it!

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It was a crazy notion — and yet, was it possible The Black Bird had finally come to roost?

Kemidov's Treasure

by JAMES M. REASONER

IT HAD BEEN A SLOW DAY, AND NICHOLAS LAKE WAS AT THE bookshelves, trying to decide on something to read. He was reaching for *The Simple Art of Murder* when the door to the outer office opened and Florence stuck her head in.

"There's a man here I think you'll want to see, Nicky."

"Then send him in," Lake replied. "And don't call me Nicky."

He sat down lazily behind the big desk as Florence ushered in the visitor. She said, "This is Mr. Kemidov. Mr. Kemidov, Mr. Lake."

Kemidov was a short, dapper young man in his mid-twenties. His hand, when Lake shook it briefly, was soft and moist. Shiny dark hair curled around his ears. There was an air about him that Lake didn't care for.

"I'm glad to meet you, Mr. Lake. You come highly recommended. But . . ."

Lake laughed shortly. "But I don't look like a private detective? Don't worry; everyone says that. The world visualizes private detectives as either sleazy little men in trenchcoats or Humphrey Bogart. I'm neither one."

Lake was a tall man with dark blond hair and a thin moustache. He had a fondness for Panama hats and white suits, and he didn't mind in the least the fact that he looked like an anachronism.

Kemidov continued, "I would like to engage your services, Mr. Lake. I am a stranger to your city, and there is a delicate matter that must be attended to."

"A delicate matter involving what?"

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"Stolen property."

Lake smiled slightly but said nothing.

"Perhaps I should give you the background?"

"By all means."

"My full name is Victor Morris Kemidov. I am of Russian ancestry. My great-grandfather was General Boris Alexivitch Kemidov. He was forced to leave Russia in 1921 because of a misunderstanding with Lenin. He relocated in Istanbul, which was then known as Constantinople, of course."

"Of course."

"During his distinguished military career, my great-grandfather accumulated a great deal of wealth. After his move to Constantinople, he began to use that wealth to satisfy a lifelong passion of his. He gradually acquired one of the finest collections of antique jewelry in all of Europe."

"And now it's been stolen."

"Yes. But that's jumping ahead quite a bit."

"Sorry."

"My great-grandfather foiled the attempts of many thieves to steal his treasure. He left Constantinople in 1932 and came to this country. Keeping his collection a secret, he settled in California and married an American woman. He did not tell even her what was in the large trunk that he kept in the attic of their house. They had one son, and just before he died, the General passed on the secret to him. Since that time, the secret of the Kemidov treasure has passed down from father to son, and the Kemidov women have known nothing of it."

"Sort of chauvinistic, don't you think?"

"Mr. Lake, we Russians respect tradition. And the so-called Women's Liberation is something my great-grandfather never heard of. He would have spat upon it if he had."

"No offense meant. Where's the trunk now?"

"I do not know for sure. That is why I wish to hire you. I have my suspicions, but I think someone else could handle this better than I."

"Who do you think stole it?"

"I said that the Kemidov women have never known the secret. That is no longer true. My sister found out, and I strongly believe that she engineered the robbery."

LAKE CAREFULLY KEPT HIS FACE EXPRESSIONLESS AND SAID, "How about some details?"

"Of course. Our father died one week ago. Before he passed away, he told me about the Kemidov treasure. I have always kept a daily

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journal, and foolishly, I wrote down the story he told me, the story I just told to you. I had always wondered what was in the trunk in the basement of our house, but it was kept locked and my father told me that I would find out someday."

After a pause, Kemidov went on, "My sister, who is three years younger than myself, is a graduate student at the university here. She flew back to our home for the funeral. The next day, I found her in my bedroom looking through my journal. She made a lame excuse about wanting to read about our father's last days, but I know she was after the secret of the trunk. She left that same evening and came back here. Two nights ago, someone entered my house and stole the trunk."

"And you think it was her?"

"I believe she was behind it, yes."

"I take it you and your sister don't get along too well?"

"There has never been much love between us. We hold entirely different philosophies."

"I suppose you looked in the trunk after your father died?"

"Naturally. I knew what to expect, and yet I was still stunned. There were many jewelled rings and necklaces and carved figurines and miniatures. I was going to have an art expert appraise it all, but it was stolen before I could do it. Still, I would guess its value to be in the millions."

"And it's been sitting around in dusty attics and basements for over fifty years," Lake mused.

"Exactly. When it is recovered, I will definitely put it to better use."

Lake let that pass and asked, "Where were you when the trunk was stolen?"

"I was out, attending a party given by friends."

"You left the valuables there unguarded?"

"My servant was there, an old man named Mikhail. He was my father's servant, too. The thieves hit him on the head. He died the next morning."

Lake's air of nonchalance vanished. He sat up straighter and said, "You told the police, I hope."

"Of course. I simply left out any mention of the trunk. The police assumed that Mikhail surprised the intruders before they stole anything, and that after they struck him down, they fled in fear."

"You must be pretty certain that your sister has the trunk."

"I am positive. It would be just like her to steal it."

"And you want me to recover it for you?"

"Yes. I don't know how you would go about something like that, so I leave it entirely in your hands. I am prepared to pay whatever you wish

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for your services."

Lake picked up the office phone and told Florence, "Draw up a contract for Mr. Kemidov. The usual fee." When he had hung up, he said, "That's a hundred dollar retainer and twenty-five dollars a day, plus expenses."

Kemidov frowned. "So little? I thought it would be much more." He looked around at the ornately furnished office.

"I have a legacy from my father, too, Mr. Kemidov. He was Robert Edwin Lake, and he left me quite a bit of money. I can afford to do whatever I want and not worry about showing a profit."

Kemidov swallowed and said, "You mean you do this work for . . . for *fun*?"

Lake grinned. "You might say that. I see it as a continuing education."

Kemidov shook his head, wrote out a check, signed the contract, and gave Lake some more details about his sister. He told Lake the name of the hotel where he was staying and then left the office with another limp handshake.

Florence popped back in after he was gone and said, "What do you think, Nicky? Is he for real?"

Lake was standing at the window, looking out at the sunshine. "He told me a story that's either a romantic fantasy come to life or the biggest bunch of garbage to come along in a great while. It was just interesting enough that I want to find out which."

LAKE WAS LUCKY AND FOUND A PARKING PLACE ACROSS THE street from the university administration building. He piloted the Mercedes into it. As he got out, he glanced around at the campus where he had spent four years a decade and a half earlier. The diploma they had given him was stuck in a desk somewhere at home.

His suit and hat got a few curious looks from passing students as he walked toward the building, but he was used to that. He went through the massive front doors, past a row of columns that gave the building a Roman look, and down a long, high-ceilinged hall. His footsteps echoed hollowly. A sign with an arrow on it told him that the Registrar's office was through a door on his left. Before he went in, he rechecked the notebook where he had written down all the information given to him by Victor Kemidov.

Something tickled the back of his brain, something about his client's name.

For a long moment, he tried to grasp it but failed. With a mental shrug, he replaced the notebook in his pocket and went into the office.

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A pretty co-ed was working behind the counter. She greeted him with a wide smile and said, "Could I help you, sir?"

"Is Anna Kemidov around?" he drawled. "I was supposed to meet her here."

"No, sir, I'm sorry. Anna's not working this afternoon. She'll be here in the morning, though."

"I could have sworn she said she worked in the Registrar's office in the afternoons."

"No, sir, her shift is 8:30 to 1." The girl glanced at a clock on the wall. "In fact, I think she's in a Political Science seminar right now."

"Oh, yes, that's over in . . . ."

"Webster Hall," the girl furnished.

"Of course, Webster Hall. I remember now. I had it backwards. Well, I'll just run over there and try to catch her when she gets out. Thank you very much."

"No trouble, sir."

He stopped the first student he saw outside and asked where Webster Hall was. Following the directions, he found it to be a two story, red brick building that had been built in the Thirties by Roosevelt's New Deal. Directly across the street was a fast food restaurant, so Lake went over and settled down by a window with a milkshake.

He had been there for perhaps a quarter of an hour when a steady stream of students began coming out of Webster Hall. He watched closely and spotted a short girl with long black hair. She walked down the street with two boys, and Lake paid for his milkshake and fell in behind them, some fifty yards back. Kemidov's description of his sister had been very good.

Anna Kemidov and her two companions walked across the campus briskly. She talked and laughed all the way. Lake hung back, admiring the tight fit of her jeans.

The trio's destination was a garage apartment two blocks from the campus. Lake let them get a good lead, because he knew he would be conspicuous on the quiet, tree-lined street. When he saw for sure where they were going, he peeled off and went back to his car. Removing his hat and coat, he drove past the apartment once, not too fast, not too slow. He noticed with interest a large tree next to the garage.

After the one drive-by, Lake went home to his father's mansion on the edge of town. He knew he would never be able to think of it as his own, but he didn't care anymore. He did the job he had chosen to do, and that was all that concerned him.

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That, and the blue Ford that trailed him all the way home from the university.

WHEN THE DARKNESS HAD SETTLED DOWN COMPLETELY, Lake drove back toward the campus. He left his Panama hat at home, and his white suit had been replaced by a black pullover and slacks. He parked several blocks from the garage apartment and walked quietly toward it in the night.

Lights shone through the windows of the apartment. Lake slid through the shadows and into the open garage beneath it. An old car bulked in the darkness. Lake took a tiny penlight from his pocket and moved the little beam around carefully. Footsteps moved across the room above him, and he heard the girl's voice.

Junk was piled to the top of the rear wall. It was a welter of boxes, rags, old bicycle tires, and all the other things that accumulate in garages. He poked through it briefly, then the light picked up a door in a shadowed corner. He guessed that it probably let into a storeroom. The knob turned under his gentle touch.

The area inside was a storeroom, all right. There were more boxes, some of them covered with a canvas to one side.

The light struck highlights on the brass that was worked in elaborate patterns on the lid of General Kemidov's trunk.

And when he opened it gingerly, the light illuminated the floating dust motes that were the trunk's sole occupants.

Lake let the lid down softly and clicked the light off. More voices came from upstairs. He moved quickly but quietly outside and leaned for a moment against the big tree. A man came to the window of the apartment and looked outside, but Lake was deep in shadow. After a moment, the man moved away from the window.

Lake drew a pair of thin gloves onto his hands and reached up to grasp a limb. He climbed up to the level of the windows, being careful to keep himself on the other side of the tree trunk. He heard a clattering noise inside that he recognized as a mimeograph machine.

He found comfortable hand-and-footholds and eased his head to the side where he could see into the apartment. He saw a man operating the mimeo machine and another man drinking from a can of beer. They were the two who had been with Anna Kemidov in the afternoon. The one at the machine called out, "Hey, Anna, we need more paper."

She came into view carrying an armload of mimeo sheets. She put them on a table by the machine and said, "I hope these posters do more good than the last ones did. People just laughed at them."

"They won't be laughing when the revolution comes."

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The one with the beer belched and said, "What revolution? This isn't the Sixties anymore, man. These punks today don't want to revolt. They want to study accounting and get drunk and feel nostalgic about the Fifties, when they were all of four years old. Some revolutionaries!"

"You're a fine one to be talking, Allen," Anna replied hotly. "At least we're trying. Someone has to oppose people like my brother."

The one at the machine laughed. "How is the little Czar these days, still as decadent as ever?"

Anna frowned. "I don't think he even cared that our father died. All he was concerned about was the money he would come into. Well, his joy was short-lived, I would imagine."

Allen the beer drinker asked, "Did he call you a Bolshevik this time?"

"He called me many things, none of them pleasant. Is that enough paper, Tom?"

"Should be," Tom grunted, working the mimeo.

Lake's hands were getting tired, and he let himself down out of the tree. He had not particularly liked Victor Kemidov, but it looked like the young Russian had been telling the truth. The trunk existed, that was for sure. And Anna and her friends certainly looked like they could use all the extra funds they could lay their hands on.

HE SLIPPED BACK TO THE CAR AND HEADED FOR HOME. HE watched the rearview mirror all the way, and when he pulled into the long drive that led to the mansion, he sped up to the house, jumped out of the car, and sprinted back across the well-manicured lawn. He fell onto his stomach behind the hedge that bordered the estate and found a small opening through which he peered intently. It was only a few seconds before a nondescript blue Ford drove by. Lake noted down the license number in his mind, figuring that he would check it out when he had the chance.

When the Ford was out of sight, Lake stood up and brushed himself off. He went into the house, telling Simpson the butler that he would not require his services anymore this night. Picking up the telephone in the library, he dialed the number of the hotel where Victor Kemidov was staying.

Kemidov came on the line and identified himself. Lake said, "Mr. Kemidov, this is Nicholas Lake. I've looked into the matter we discussed this afternoon, and it looks very much like your conclusions were correct."

"You've located the General's trunk?"

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"The trunk, yes; its contents, no."

"She has them. There is no doubt of that. Where is the trunk?"

Lake told him about the storeroom in the garage and the empty trunk. He left out the conversation he had overheard.

Kemidov's tone was happy as he said, "Now you will go confront her, correct? Demand the return of my great-grandfather's treasures?"

"That's one way. I could offer to buy them back from her."

"No! She and her so-called comrades must not profit from their lawlessness. Demand the treasure back! Right is on our side."

Lake sighed. "I play whatever tune you call, Mr. Kemidov. I'll call you tomorrow and tell you how it comes out."

"Excellent. Good night, Mr. Lake."

"Good night, Mr. Kemidov."

As Lake cradled the phone, the unknown something that had bothered him earlier stirred again, and again it slipped away. For some unfathomable reason, he found himself staring at the bookshelves that surrounded him. They stretched from floor to ceiling, and the majority of the titles they contained were mystery novels.

He shifted mental gears and wondered why someone had been following him. There was no apparent reason for it, but then the best reasons were seldom apparent.

He puzzled over it for a time and then went to bed. The whole business kept him awake for quite a while, tossing and turning in the antique four-poster for which his father had paid sixteen thousand dollars.

WHEN LAKE CAME INTO HIS OFFICE THE NEXT MORNING, Florence was sitting at her desk reading the morning paper, a frown on her pretty face. As Lake hung up his hat, she said, "There's something in here you should read, Nicky."

He took the paper from her and said, "No one else in the world calls me Nicky, Florence. I'd appreciate it if you would make it unanimous. Where is it?"

"Down at the bottom of page four."

He saw the headline POLICE RAID NEAR CAMPUS and felt a flutter in his stomach. The story went on, "Acting on information from an unidentified source, police raided an apartment near the university last night and arrested the three occupants on the charge of possessing stolen property. Arrested were Allen Cunningham, 25, Thomas Rowe, 25, and Anna Kemidov, 23. All three are students at the university.

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Police seized an antique trunk which was stolen three days ago from Ms. Kemidov's brother, Victor Kemidov."

There was more, but that was enough for Lake. He put the paper down slowly and turned toward the door of the inner office. Florence said, "The D.A.'s office called. They'll want you to testify at the trial when it comes up. And a messenger delivered this just before you came in."

She handed him an envelope with his name typed on it. He opened it silently and pulled out a folded piece of paper. A yellow slip fell to the desk as he opened it. He read the writing on the paper, then suddenly crumpled it and said softly, "Damn! He must have called the cops as soon as I hung up." He dropped the wadded ball of paper on the desk and stalked into his office, slamming the door behind him.

Florence picked up the yellow slip and saw that it was a check for five thousand dollars, signed by Victor Kemidov. The paper, when she smoothed it out, was a note that read:

> *Dear Mr. Lake, I have decided that it would be wrong to let my sister and her companions escape the consequences of their violent actions. Therefore, I have notified the authorities of the proof of their crime. I trust that this meets with your approval and that you will cooperate with the police in their investigation. I am enclosing a check which I hope will cover your services on my behalf. Yours truly, Victor Kemidov.*

Inside, Lake paced back and forth furiously. He had been used. He knew it now, and he hated it. The payoff was just added insult. He let his anger boil for a moment more, then picked up the phone, dialed a number, and said, "Mr. Kemidov, Suite 4, please."

The voice of the hotel operator came back, "I'm sorry, sir, Mr. Kemidov checked out an hour ago."

Let down, cheated of a target for his wrath, Lake said, "Thank you," and hung up. After a moment's thought, he decided that there was one more thing he could do.

He went out and grabbed his hat, saying to Florence, "Those kids will need a good lawyer. Call Ned Flanagan and have him meet me at the jail."

She said, "Right, Nicky." But by that time, he was gone.

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ANNA KEMIDOV, ALLEN CUNNINGHAM, AND THOMAS ROWE sat on one side of the table, Lake and white-haired Ned Flanagan on the other. Lake began by saying, "My name is Nicholas Lake; I'm a private investigator. Your brother hired me, Miss Kemidov, to recover some property of his that he thought you had stolen."

Anna glared and said, "We didn't steal anything! I didn't even know the trunk was missing."

Lake went on, "That's not the point. You'll still need a good lawyer, not only to face the theft charges, but there will probably be a murder charge, or at least manslaughter, because of Mikhail's death. Mr. Flanagan here is one of the best attorneys in the country, and I'm going to hire him on your behalf."

The three young people were still trying to digest Lake's statement about murder charges. They looked aghast and terrified at the thought. Allen Cunningham stammered, "B-but we didn't have anything to do with it, man." Anger came onto his face. "Hey, it was you turned us in to the cops, wasn't it?"

Lake clasped his hands together on the table. "No. I found the trunk in the storeroom last night, and I reported it to my employer, Victor Kemidov. He expressed no interest in contacting the police at the time; all he wanted to do was recover his goods. He changed his mind, though. It's possible that he planned to turn you in all along, as soon as he knew for sure that you had the trunk. I got a check from him this morning that smelled of payoff and a guilty conscience. Now if you'll just tell the whole story to Mr. Flanagan, I'm sure he'll be able to prepare a good defense."

Anna looked puzzled. "Why are you doing this, Mr. Lake?"

"Because I have the inescapable feeling that your brother used me," he replied in a level voice. "I don't like the feeling."

"So now you try to make up for it with your money?"

"I don't blame you for being bitter, but I'm just trying to help."

Anna stared down at the table for a long minute, then raised her eyes to meet Lake's. "If you really want to help, there is something I must tell you. Alone."

"Anything you can tell me, you can tell Mr. Flanagan."

"No. You helped get us into this trouble. Now you can get us out."

Lake's features grew taut, but he said evenly, "All right, if you feel that way, I'll do whatever I can." He nodded to Flanagan.

When the lawyer had left the room and the two boys had been taken back to their cells, Anna Kemidov looked intently at Lake and said, "My brother and I have never been close, but still I hate to say this about him . . ."

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Ten minutes later, Lake came out of the room and found Flanagan in the hall. He asked, "Has bail been set?"

"Yes. They said they couldn't raise it."

"Take care of it. Then take them to my house and keep them there. I'll be relying on you to keep them out of trouble while I'm gone, Ned."

"You going somewhere?"

"Yes, I'm going to take a little trip." He went over to a public phone, dropped coins into it, and called the office. "Florence? Listen. Kemidov's address is on that check, isn't it? Good. Call Alex and tell him to get the jet ready. Then call Chief Wilkins here and tell him I'm going to need to talk to the chief of police there. See if he knows him and can put me in touch. And I need to talk to Harvey at DMV. Got all that?" He paused for a moment. "Good. But don't call me Nicky. You're not Nora Charles, for God's sake."

As he said that, a strange expression came onto his face. He had finally caught a glimpse of the elusive thing that had been bothering him. He thought he knew where he had heard the name Kemidov before. As he hung up the phone, he shook his head and muttered to himself, "No, it couldn't be. Too far out. No chance."

But somehow, he wasn't convinced.

IN THE NEXT NINE HOURS, LAKE TALKED TO HIS FRIEND Harvey Cooper at the State Department of Motor Vehicles, paid a visit to Chief of Police Joseph Wilkins, flew across several states in his private jet while he reread sections of one of his favorite books, talked to another chief of police and several vice squad officers, and drove a rented car down a dark street lined with huge trees and old mansions.

Lake brought the car to a stop in a particularly dark stretch of road, next to a high brick wall. He had killed his lights and motor a block earlier, and the car made little noise as it coasted to a halt. He eased the door open, slid out, and eased it shut. He was wearing the same black outfit he had worn the night before, and it made him almost invisible as he glided through the darkness beside the wall.

A gate with iron grillwork marked the entrance to the estate behind the wall. It was padlocked, but Lake had to try only three of the keys he had on the ring in his pocket before it snapped open. He swung the gate back carefully, trying to minimize the squealing of rusted hinges.

Once he was inside, he left the gravel drive and padded silently across the lawn. The grass was long and unkempt, and Lake figured that in the daylight, the whole place would look rundown.

It was too dark to make out much detail about the house. He could tell that it was huge and rambling and had two or three stories. A light

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was burning in an upstairs window, but the bottom appeared dark and deserted.

The penlight proved useful again in locating a door. Like most old houses, this one had an entrance directly into the cellar. The lock on it was old and brittle, and Lake opened it easily. The light showed him a flight of wooden steps which he descended carefully. Unseen cobwebs brushed against his face.

When he reached the concrete floor, he moved the beam of light around rapidly. He saw an old furnace, some gas cans, a pile of cardboard boxes, and a lot of dust and cobwebs. It looked like a normal cellar.

Somewhere in it was a fortune.

There were only a few places to look, and Lake started with the boxes. The first four he opened were empty. When he lifted the lid of the fifth, the light was bounced and refracted back in myriad patterns by the jewels within. Lake whistled softly between his teeth.

He reached into the box and came up with a handful of necklaces and bracelets that were dripping with precious stones. He sifted them through his fingers and let them trickle back down into the box. He played the light around over the dazzling display.

Suddenly, when the light reached a far corner, it picked up a different reflection. Something underneath a jewelled tiara was giving off a dull black gleam. Lake's breath caught in his throat as he reached for the object.

He could feel his heart beating fast and strong in his chest. His fingers touched the cool, slick enamel and closed around it. He lifted it up.

Nicholas Lake held in his hands a small black statuette, carved in the image of a falcon.

HE LET HIS BREATH OUT SLOWLY, WONDERING IF THE CRAZY ideas running rampant through his mind could possibly be true. They had to be; he held the proof in his sweating palms.

There was a click, and light showered down on him. He nearly dropped the bird as he spun around in surprise. Victor Kemidov stood at the top of another flight of stairs leading up into the house. "Mr. Lake, this is going to cause no end of trouble," he said. "Why didn't you just deposit my check and forget about the whole thing?"

Lake's racing pulse slowed down a bit as he drew a deep breath. "Because I don't like being played for a sap," he replied. "I don't like being used to help frame three kids for a murder they didn't commit. I don't like real murderers getting away with their crimes."

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"My, there certainly are a lot of things you don't like." Kemidov gestured with the pistol he held. "Put the falcon down, and please be careful with it. Just how much do you actually know, anyway?"

"Enough. Your sister told me she had seen notations in your diary of payments to someone with the initials A.L. She assumed that A.L. was a gambler or a loan shark. Evidently, you're quite a wastrel in her eyes, Kemidov."

"She always was a commoner at heart. GO on with your story."

"Earlier today I talked with the chief of police here and several members of the vice squad. They told me about a man named Alvin Litton, a small-time gangster who has been seen with you several times."

"And he is a man who has much better judgment at picking horses than do I. But I'm sorry; I didn't mean to interrupt. How does the rest of it go?"

"I wasn't sure of that, and I'm still not. But when Anna told me about your money problems, that made me consider other alternatives to her guilt.

"If you owed money to someone, your inheritance of the treasure would more than take care of it. You would have no reason to steal from yourself, since you could convert the legacy to cash legally and pay what you owed, and you would have even less reason to frame your sister and her friends for the theft of the trunk."

Lake was calculating distances and angles as he went on, "But an old man named Mikhail died, and murder was a completely different matter. If you were implicated in that somehow, the safest thing for you to do would be to throw all the blame on someone else. Down at police headquarters, they already knew about the connection between you and Litton. Without my handy discovery of the chest in that garage, they would have started shining a very bright light into your dealings, and I don't think you could have stood that."

Kemidov's teeth gritted and his fist tightened on the pistol. "Damn Mikhail! If he hadn't come snooping down here, everything would have been fine. He carried on so when he saw us unloading the trunk, said priceless works of art should not be used to pay filthy gambling debts. We were both traditionalists, Mikhail and I, but he knew nothing of modern expediency. Still, Alvin should not have hit him so hard just to quiet him down."

"And when the old man turned out to be dead, you and Litton hatched your plan to frame Anna. You waited several days to fly out so that Litton would have time to transport the trunk, probably in a rented truck."

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Kemidov walked slowly down the stairs, keeping the gun lined up on Lake. "Perfectly correct, Mr. Lake. We hid the treasures in the unused furnace while the police made their investigation of the supposed break-in. I must say that it was none too thorough, since at the time I reported nothing stolen. It was only later, after Mikhail had died in the hospital, that I discovered the 'missing' trunk. But this is all ridiculous, Mr. Lake. You can prove none of this. You are no threat to me, now that I think about it."

Lake pointed to the glittering pile in the box. "What about that?"

"If you choose to go to the police with this story of yours, by the time they secured a search warrant, those baubles will no longer be here."

"Someone was keeping track of my movements back home, someone in a rented car. I checked the number. I wonder what would happen if I got a picture of Litton and showed it to the people at the rental agency?"

Kemidov's mouth set in hard lines, and he said, "I could just shoot you down and save myself a lot of trouble, you know. You are the intruder here, you broke and entered. Your death would be messy, no doubt, but it could be handled if need be." He sighed. "I hoped that I had judged you correctly and that you would accept my check quietly."

Lake smiled sardonically. "You thought I was a spoiled rich boy playing private eye, is that it? Well, maybe you're right, Kemidov, but some people take their games very seriously."

"Another check perhaps? I could use your testimonay at my sister's trial."

"No. But there is one thing I'd very much like to know." He bent slowly and carefully so as not to alarm Kemidov and plucked the black bird out of the box. "Is this . . . possibly . . . what it looks like?"

Kemidov smiled and chuckled. "Who knows, Mr. Lake? I believe Dashiell Hammett was a private detective himself at one time, with many underworld contacts. Perhaps he heard of my great-grandfather. Perhaps his fiction of the Maltese Falcon was more fact than anyone knew. The figure itself exists, of that there is no doubt."

"But the business about it being made of gold and encrusted with jewels . . .?"

"I intend to find out in the near future. But now I must deal with you."

"I'd like to know now," Lake said, and he let the bird slip from his fingers. It landed on the concrete floor with a shattering crash as Kemidov let out a cry of surprise. His eyes grew wide as he stared at the finest jewels of Asia, sparkling amidst shards of black enamel.

Lake's eyes never left the gun as he took a quick step and slapped it

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to the side. Kemidov's finger contracted. The gun exploded, but the bullet buried itself harmlessly in the cellar wall. Lake bunched his shoulders and drove his left fist deep into the Russian's stomach. Kemidov's breath puffed out, his face turned white, and the gun fell to the floor, landing on rubies and emeralds. Kemidov folded up and fell over, all of the fight gone out of him.

Lake stooped and picked up the gun. Diamonds rolled under his feet as he headed for the stairs, looking for a telephone.

THE NEXT DAY, LAKE LEANED BACK IN HIS OFFICE CHAIR and smiled at Florence. "He was too paranoid," he said. "If he had left things like they were and not tried to frame Anna, he might have bluffed his way through it. The frame was really Litton's idea; like most criminals, he tried to cover every possible source of danger."

"What happens now?" Florence asked.

"Well, Anna, Tom, and Allen go free, that's the most important thing. Kemidov and Litton will face criminal conspiracy and manslaughter charges. Hopefully, they'll stick, although the D.A. down there wasn't too happy with me. Said I could have blown the whole case by taking things into my own hands. I didn't like being Kemidov's pawn, though."

Florence started to go back to the outer office when she paused and asked hesitantly, "Nicky . . . Do you think it was the real one? The real Maltese Falcon?"

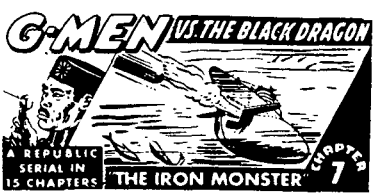
Lake got a faraway look on his face. "I don't believe very much in coincidence. But I'm afraid the answer to that one went with Dashiell Hammett to his grave."

"What was it again? The thing that Bogart said when . . . Who was it that played the policeman?"

"Ward Bond," Lake supplied.

"When Ward Bond asked him what it was?"

"'The stuff that dreams are made of,'" Nicholas Lake mused. "And don't call me Nicky." ●



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The iceman killeth, and Fast Eddie was at the top of his list. But the hit man wouldn't succeed. Not if Helen had anything to say about it. She was married to Eddie, and for a gangster he really wasn't all that bad of a guy!

Iced

by HAL CHARLES

EVEN BEFORE SHE MARRIED HIM THIRTY-FIVE YEARS AGO, Helen Leighton knew that Edward Willis was what most people called a gangster. After all, with a nickname like "Fast Eddie," hands that looked more gnarled than a cypress stump, and a high-school education, how else could you explain his income of over a hundred thousand a year. But Helen liked what she saw — the exciting world Eddie lived in.

Eddie liked what he saw too. A tall, willowy blond, a Boston upbringing, a graduate of Radcliffe, the lady had class. So he had picked her, a real corsage to wear on his upward climb through the organization.

There was only one catch. In a romantic moment he had agreed that once a week she could choose their activity. Unfortunately for him, Helen didn't like fancy dinners or expensive clothes; she liked culture. And so "Fast Eddie," the greasy kid from the tenements went to the Met, toured the Modern Art Museum, and took up mud sculpture.

Usually the baragain worked out well. Six nights a week she was there at the end of the day to listen to his tales about the bribes, the pressures, even the broken bones.

But that Tuesday night when Willie the Porter and the Tampa Truck invited him down to Shilito's Garage for some high-stakes poker, it had

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been an offer he had to refuse. Helen insisted on going out to the University for her latest interest, the Great Writers of the Western World Lecture Series.

The lecturer, a Professor Hardy, was your basic academic type, Eddie decided. The beard, the tweed jacket, the pipe, and the soft voice. He pranced around in front of the furcoated dames and tuxedoed guys. How could these people be so interested in an old Greek play about some creep who wasted his father and married his mother? Besides, Eddie had more important things on his mind. Mr. Antonio had called a meeting for the next morning, and nobody knew why.

"Edward," Helen said as they finally left the lecture hall, "isn't *Oedipus Rex* marvelous? The characterization, the poetry . . ."

"The only good part was where the dame stretched her neck."

"Oh, Edward," Helen tittered, brushing his slate-gray hair from his forehead. "I wish you could learn to appreciate some of the finer things of life."

STEPPING OFF THE ELEVATOR ONTO THE EIGHTEENTH FLOOR that belonged to Unicorn Enterprises, Eddie felt the familiar uneasiness. He hated the smiling secretaries, the walls lined with computers, the parade of three-piece suits. He missed the back room on 49th St. and the guys with their racing forms and poker chips. He longed for the old excitement of swigging liquor from brown bags while trying to stay one step ahead of the cops.

Listening to Richard Gregory's report on the take (now called "quarterly income"), Eddie was more aware that Mr. Antonio was getting sicker. For months the old man had been growing thinner, and now after every sentence the boss had to take a deep breath from an ever-present oxygen tank. Eddie was bothered more though by Mr. Antonio's comments about the business. What did he mean by "weak cash flow strategy," "inflationary hedges," and "retrenchment"?

Eddie was sick too — sick of young guys like Gregory. He seemed to always get Mr. A's attention with his taperecorder voice and armful of charts.

"Thank you for the encouraging report on our last quarter, Gregory," wheezed the boss. "You've made me feel better."

"I appreciate your confidence in my ability to handle the corporation's management," said the youthful figure in the blue-flannel suit.

Mr. Antonio took a breath. "Now about the grand jury probe into our affairs."

Eddie beamed. "I took care of that, boss."

"I know," frowned the old man, "but my idea of an efficient busi-

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ness transaction doesn't involve having the prosecutor found in a hotel room with a shiv stuck between his ribs."

"You said we had to do something."

"In another week," Gregory interrupted, "we would have met the hotshot's price, and the probe would have quietly disappeared. Now every law enforcement agency in the Big Apple is out to get the prosecutor's killer."

"Don't worry," said Eddie, "I contracted the best — The Iceman."

Mr. Antonio slowly turned toward him. "You never learned we can't operate the way we used to. Our organization is big business."

"You and me go way back, Mr. A., even before WWII," Eddie said. "My way of handling problems was always good enough in the past."

"The past is dead." Mr. Antonio picked up his portable respirator. "The doctors don't give me long, and I want to spend what time I've got left in the Florida sunshine. The real reason I called you two together is to tell you I'm stepping down. Starting next Monday, Richard, you'll be running Unicorn Enterprises."

Eddie was flabbergasted. "But . . ."

"And Eddie," continued the old man, "I want you to know you'll be provided for, too. It's time two old horses got out of the race."

"Me retire! Mr. A., I got a lot of good years left. I can whip anybody in the business."

"That's just it. Force isn't the answer anymore. It might have worked down on 49th St. when we were muscling our way uptown, but now we play by different rules."

Eddie started to protest, but the old man waved his hand and departed. The young executive stood across from him, fidgeting with computer sheets. "Say, Eddie, didn't I see you at the lecture last night. Frankly, I thought Hardy's discussion of *Macbeth* last week was much more astute."

"Cut the small talk, Gregory. I'm not taking this lying down."

"What does that mean?"

Eddie left him, the question still on his face.

HELEN PUT DOWN HER SHAKESPEARE THE MINUTE HE walked in and fixed him a double bourbon. Eddie like his liquor strong As usual she was quite interested in his day, making him repeat every thing that happened.

"Look on the bright side," she said when he finished. "You've survived in a business with a high mortality rate more years than you could expect. We could travel, visit Europe, the Orient — see all the

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things we've read about. We certainly have all the money we need."

"The money's not important. It's never been. It's not right. Guys like Gregory haven't paid their dues. You don't get your knuckles bruised typing reports in business school."

"Edward, it's like Tennyson says: 'The old order changeth yielding place to new.' Accept the change."

"Not without a fight. Tomorrow I'm going to see Louis. He owes me."

THE NEXT TIME EDDIE SAW LOUIS ANTONIO HIS FORMER BOSS was laid out in the most expensive casket money could buy. His lungs hadn't held out long enough to breathe the Miami air. Eddie tried to corner Richard Gregory, but the new president of Unicorn Enterprises successfully dodged him, hiding behind the mountain of tears and flowers.

Finally after the last carnation had been tossed into the grave, Eddie caught up with his youthful adversary.

"Gregory, we've got to talk."

"There's nothing more to be said. You're through." The slender man in the cashmere topcoat turned his back to leave.

"You're not getting rid of me that easy," Eddie retaliated, spinning Gregory around and pinning him to the limousine. "I can cause you a lot of trouble with what I know. You'll only get rid of me over my dead body."

His dilated eyes scanning the shocked entourage, Gregory slowly straightened his tie. "That, old timer, can be arranged."

THE FOLLOWING WEEK WAS FRUSTRATING FOR EDDIE. Nobody at Unicorn would talk to him. A new man had taken over his office, and even the computers had no record of his existence. He was *persona non grata.*

Eddie was almost grateful when Helen led him off to the University Lecture Series. But, despite his troubles, he found it difficult to concentrate on Professor Hardy, who treated the lecture platform like a ballet stage.

"So in the final analysis," concluded the lecturer, "it's difficult for one to determine Montresor's exact motivation in getting his best friend drunk on the infamous cask of amontillado, leading him downstairs, and immuring him in his wine cellar."

"Right now," whispered Eddie to Helen, "I'd like to have some of that wine myself."

"Ssssh!" she said.

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"Next week will be my last lecture. Please read Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls.*"

The bell almost tolled for Eddie later that night. After dropping Helen at the front door, Eddie went back, locked the gate, and headed toward the house. In the dry grass ahead he heard a snap. Instinctively he lunged behind a marble statue. His face buried in Helen's geraniums, he heard a distinct sound from his past — the unmistakeable chatter of a chopper.

Then silence.

After a while Eddie rose. In front of him the ancient gladiator still stood, a pockmarked mass of marble.

It took him an hour to calm Helen down.

Then the telephone rang. In hurried whispers the Tampa Truck confirmed what Eddie had just learned first-hand — a contract was out on him. It didn't take a genius to figure out who was paying for it.

As in the past, Eddie dialed the newspaper and put in the familiar classified ad: ESKIMO NEEDS ICE. CALL 954-3344.

Shortly after the evening edition hit the streets, the phone rang.

"I'm calling about the ad," said a muffled voice.

"Iceman," said a well-controlled Eddie, "the client is Richard Gregory, Unicorn Enterprises."

Eddie thought he detected a slight chuckle.

"The usual terms. $20,000. Same P.O. box, in advance."

The phone went dead.

Two days later so did Eddie's adversary.

"HURRY UP, EDWARD," HELEN CALLED, CHECKING HER makeup in the hallway mirror. "We don't want to be the last ones there."

Fumbling with his French cuffs, Eddie slowly descended the staircase.

"What are you so nervous about? I thought the paper would help you relax." She gestured to the foyer table where an open newspaper revealed: SUSPECTED GANG LEADER COMMITS SUICIDE. "Your Iceman has a certain class the way he made Gregory appear to have hanged himself."

Eddie said vacantly, "He's never failed to fulfill a contract."

"You don't seem too happy about this turn of events. After all, tomorrow you'll be taking over the reins of Unicorn."

"You don't understand, Helen. That attempt on me two nights ago — it was the Iceman. Tampa told me the word on the streets was that Gregory hired the Iceman to get rid of me."

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"But Gregory's dead."

"That doesn't matter to the Iceman. He's a pro. He took the money up front — he'll make the hit."

Helen shivered. "Can't you stop him?"

"How? Nobody knows who he is. That's why he's so effective."

"Maybe we shouldn't go out then."

He kissed her cheek lightly. "I know how important tonight is for you. Not everybody gets an invitation to dinner with the professor. Besides I've kept my promise for thirty-five years — I'm not going to break it tonight."

EDDIE WAS MORE IMPRESSED WITH HARDY'S RESTORED Tudor mansion than he had been with the professor. Of course Helen was in heaven amongst the oil paintings, sculptures, and leather-bound books.

"I'm sorry," Hardy said, leading them to his study, "that you misunderstood my invitation. It was for tomorrow night."

"Oh," said Eddie with a tinge of embarrassment, "that's why nobody else is here."

"No matter. We'll have some more sherry and talk." The professor emptied the crystal decanter into Helen's glass. "Mr. Willis impresses me as a man who appreciates things other than the arts, things like a beautiful woman and a fine wine. Speaking of the latter, I see our well's run dry. Perhaps, Mr. Willis, you'd like to select the next bottle from my wine cellar."

Eddie rose. "Sounds good to me."

"Feel free to browse through my library, Mrs. Willis," said Hardy departing. "I have a splendid collection of first editions."

She worked her way through the centuries, admiring a Shakespeare folio, pausing to examine an original *Alice In Wonderland,* until she came to the professor's walnut desk. Stacked in the corner were the books from the lecture series — *Oedipus Rex, An American Tragedy, For Whom the Bell Tolls, The Stranger* . . .

Suddenly Helen felt cold. "Oh, no!" she uttered. *It was the books!*

THEY TOASTED EACH OTHER WITH THE PALE DRY AMONTILLADO.

"How did you figure it out?" he asked, wiping the last of the white powder from his hands.

"All the books for the lecture series were about death. Don't you see, in *Macbeth* the king was stabbed — that's exactly what happened to that prosecuter. Like Oedipus's wife, Richard Gregory was hanged.

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And the machine gun the other night was right out of *For Whom the Bell Tolls.*"

"So that's where The Iceman got his ideas."

"And he was planning to kill you tonight using Poe's 'Cask of Amontillado' as his model."

"If you hadn't come down when you did, it'd be me walled up in the wine cellar."

He poured them another sherry.

"To Unicorn Enterprises and its new boss," she toasted.

Eddie raised his glass. "To culture."

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She was a legend of the screen. How could she have killed anyone? And why?

The Final Performance

by PATRICK SCAFFETTI

I PARKED MY CAR IN THE CIRCULAR DRIVEWAY OF CHARlotte Page's Oceanfront mansion at ten-fifteen on a bright, cloudless morning. As I walked to the front door, I drew in a deep breath to ease the knot in my stomach. I glanced up and noticed that the section of the house damaged by the fire had been restored. Only the darkened bricks around the white window frames offered any evidence that flames had recently gutted three rooms on the second story.

I hesitated briefly, then jabbed the doorbell. Despite my uneasiness, I was eager to learn the answer to one of the most baffling problems I'd ever encountered in over twenty-five years of police work. Seconds later, Joan Kenwood, Miss Page's personal secretary, opened the heavy oak door. She was a slim, efficient-looking woman, and her brown eyes betrayed her startled surprise at the sight of me.

"Why, hello, Lieutenant Dawkins," she said with a weak smile. "What can I do for you?"

"I'd like to speak with Miss Page, please."

"About the fire?"

"Yes," I said.

"I thought that was all settled a month ago."

"So did I. Something has come up though."

"Oh," Miss Kenwood said in a tone inviting further explanation. I stared at her without speaking.

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"I don't mean to be nosy, Lieutenant, but part of my job is to filter all visitors to Miss Page. Even though she hasn't made a film in almost thirty years, many fans still attempt to invade her privacy. And she doesn't like to be caught . . . off guard, shall I say?"

"This isn't a fan call, Miss Kenwood. Now will you please tell Miss Page that I'm here."

The secretary nodded. "Come in, Lieutenant."

"I followed her through a huge foyer into a living room filled with gleaming glass and chrome furnishings.

"I'll let Miss Page know that you're here," Miss Kenwood said, "but you won't be able to see her until eleven o'clock. No one ever sees her before then. After thirteen years with Miss Page, I can count on the fingers of one hand the times I myself have seen her before eleven."

"Is that when she wakes up?"

"No, she's always up much earlier than that, but she uses the time to prepare herself to face the day."

"How do you communicate with her before then?"

"Over the phone for the most part. Sometimes simply through the door to her bedroom."

For a moment, I considered using my legal weight to summon Charlotte Page immediately, then decided against it. "If you're a famous actress, I suppose you're entitled to be a bit eccentric," I said.

Miss Kenwood gave me a wry smile that suggested her employer's eccentricities went well beyond not appearing until eleven. "Can I get you something while you wait, Lieutenant? Coffee, perhaps?"

"No, thanks. I think I'll take a stroll along the beach until she's ready."

"Fine. That doorwall leads to the terrace and the beach. Miss Page will be down promptly at eleven, I promise you."

"I'll be back," I said. I walked across the room, opened the sliding glass door, and stepped out onto the terrace.

OVER FORTY YARDS OF SPOTLESS BEACH SEPARATED CHARlotte Page's mansion from the Pacific. Not a soul was in sight. As I plodded toward the churning waves, my black shoes sank into the sand with each step. It gave me a strange, unsteady sensation after years of treading hard pavement.

I stopped where the beach turned a wet, bubbling brown from the water and peered out at the endless expanse of ocean and sky. Instead of finding comfort in the view, I felt more troubled than ever. I didn't like what I was going to do at eleven, but there were things I had to find out.

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I turned and looked back at the mansion. Except for a small guest house immediately next-door, there were no other buildings on either side of the mansion for almost a quarter of a mile. Charlotte Page's desire for privacy was well known. For the past several years, she had lived a secluded existence. She was seldom seen in public and rarely photographed. Her movies were now old-fashioned late night movie fare. Still, she was a Hollywood legend, and public interest in her never waned.

In the distance to my left, I could see the dwarfed outline of the Empress Hotel where Fred Chaplin had stayed. He must have been one hell of a fan of Charlotte Page to hike all this way just to see where she lived, I thought. Lucky for her that he did though. Unlucky for him.

Two months before, the story rated a couple of inches in most newspapers around the country, and Fred Chaplin became a posthumous hero to old movie buffs. The basic facts can be culled from any one of those articles.

FRED CHAPLIN, AN INSURANCE UNDERWRITER FROM TERRE Haute, was vacationing with his wife in California. He had grown up while Charlotte Page had been at the height of her stardom, and he'd idolized her. As the years passed, his devotion to the actress had continued. Even though she was now approaching sixty-five, Chaplin had still longed for a glimpse of Charlotte Page in the flesh.

The Chaplins had registered at the Empress Hotel on a Tuesday afternoon, and, that evening, Fred had set off to walk down the beach to view Charlotte Page's mansion. He arrived sometime after ten o'clock, and, while gazing at the home of his goddess, he noticed flames on the second story. Perhaps he heard screams. He rushed across the beach and onto the terrace, then sped up the narrow stairway to the balcony. Somehow, he managed to get into the blazing room. He fought his way through the billowing smoke toward the screams. Chaplin found Charlotte crouched in helpless terror on her bed, lifted her into his arms, and carried her out onto the balcony. Then, for some unknown reason, he went back into the bedroom.

Fire trucks arrived a short time later, and the blaze was soon extinguished. Still, three second story rooms in the mansion were severly damaged. When the firemen were able to search the rooms, they found Fred Chaplin's body, burned almost beyond recognition. But there was no trace of Charlotte Page.

They searched for the actress for almost an hour without success. Then, to everyone's surprise and relief, Charlotte Page stepped out of the guest house. Amazed witnesses said that she looked stunning,

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decades younger than her actual age.

As tears sparkled in her eyes, she explained that she had run down the stairs from the balcony to phone for help from the guest house. Once there, she must have passed out and awakened an hour later.

The police were called in for a routine investigation, and that's when I came into the case. I spoke with Charlotte Page for half an hour one afternoon to review all of the facts. According to the actress, she had been smoking in bed that Tuesday evening and dozed off. The cigarette somehow ignited the curtains, and she awoke choking for breath in a smoke-filled room. Paralyzed with fear, she had cried out. As though on cue, Fred Chaplin appeared to carry her to safety, then inexplicably returned to the flaming bedroom.

The aging actress's distress over Fred Chaplin's death was unquestionably sincere. There had been absolutely no reason to doubt the truth of her story, and I'd left her mansion satisfied that the tragic case was closed. Then, almost two months later, a nervous little man showed up at the police station with information that painted a whole new picture.

NOW, I GLANCED AT MY WATCH: 10:57. RELUCTANTLY, I turned and headed back toward the mansion. When I entered the living room, Miss Kenwood was waiting for me.

"Have a seat, please, Lieutenant," she said. "Miss Page will be with you presently." She left me alone in the room. I sat down on a canvas director's chair, and before I could cross my legs, Charlotte Page entered the living room, looking lovelier than the first time I had seen her two months before. Her short blonde hair was sleekly but casually arranged, and her pale blue pantsuit clung to what might have passed for a twenty-five-year-old body. Her face was unlined but expertly coated with a heavy layer of rouge and powder.

How many face lifts? I wondered. How many hours of exercise? How many injections of sheep hormones?

"Lieutenant Dawkins," she said in a husky voice and strode briskly across the room with her arm extended. "How nice to see you again."

I stood up and took her hand in mine. Though smooth, it felt brittle, as if it would crumble if I squeezed it too hard.

"What can I do for you this morning?" she asked as she sat down in a nearby chair.

I had planned on asking a few innocent questions to distract her, then hitting her with the real reason behind my visit. But, seated so close to her, staring into her large, mascara-rimmed eyes, I could not bring myself to be devious. In my youth, I, too, had been a great

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admirer of Charlotte Page.

"There was another witness to the fire, Miss Page," I said matter-of-factly. "A man fishing on the shoreline. He came to see me yesterday."

"Yes," she said, taking a cigarette from an ornate silver box on the table beside her. I fumbled my lighter out of my pocket and lit it for her.

"His story doesn't coincide with what you said took place that night. He claims to have been able to see things quite distinctly from the light of the flames."

"Oh, really? And what exactly does he say that he observed?"

"He claims that Fred Chaplin carried you onto the balcony. Then, once you were on your feet again, you grabbed an object and struck him over the head with it. You then dragged him back into the bedroom. A moment later, the fisherman saw you go down the steps and hurry over to the guest house. You were carrying a small piece of luggage."

I FELT FOOLISH REPEATING THE FISHERMAN'S STORY. WITH this legend of the screen so near, the entire tale seemed inconceivable. There was no doubt that Charlotte Page had never before laid eyes on the anonymous underwriter from Indiana. There had been no previous contact between them before the night of the fire. He saved her life. What possible motive could she have for wanting him dead?

"What happens now, Lieutenant?"

"What do you mean?"

"If it's my word against the fisherman's, what's the next step?"

"A preliminary hearing," I said. "Then, perhaps, a trial."

"Which would be long and drawn out and a carnival for the press."

"More than likely."

Charlotte Page leaned back against her chair and blew a thin stream of smoke from between her sensuously painted lips. I had seen her do this before, fifty times larger than life, in a movie called *Wanton Woman.*

"Guilt is a terrible thing, Lieutenant Dawkins," she said. "It nibbles at your heart at odd moments during the day. At night, it keeps sleep at bay. Guilt never lets you forget." She sighed, and the lids closed over her haunting eyes. Somehow, the words sounded familiar, and I recalled that she'd delivered a similar speech in *Wanton Woman.*

"Is the fisherman telling the truth?" I asked.

Without opening her eyes, she nodded. "It was a rash, insane act, but I hit Mr. Chaplin with a marble ashtray and then dragged him back

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into that inferno. I also risked my own life to retrieve something that I needed desperately."

"I thought that Chaplin was a stranger to you," I said, trying to keep my voice steady.

"He was. I had never seen nor heard of him before that night. It was simply his misfortune to come to my aid."

"What did you do once you left the bedroom that night?"

"I went to the guest house to get ready to face the inevitable people." Charlotte paused to drag deeply on her cigarette, then continued. "I'm sure that you know I'm not a young woman. The last thirty years of my life have been devoted to preserving my youthful appearance. There are many things I must do to create the illusion. Lotions, exercises, diet, and, of course, cosmetics. It takes me well over an hour to apply my make-up each morning. That's why I refuse to see anyone until eleven."

As she spoke, Charlotte Page seemed to age visibly, and, by the time she finished, an old woman sat across from me.

"But why?" I asked gently. "If you didn't know Chaplin and he jeopardized his own life to save you, why did you kill him?"

Her eyes opened wide then, and she looked at me as though her motive had been apparent from the start.

"Because, Lieutenant," she explained softly, "he saw me without my make-up." ●

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What a daring scheme: take the robbing hoods in Sherwood Forest and turn them into Good Guys. Ridiculous! And yet —

John, The Confidence Chap

by ARTHUR MOORE

IT WAS A CLEAR DAY IN SHERWOOD FOREST AS JOHN GOODfellow drew rein and climbed from his horse. Several green clad clods surrounded him, and one put an arrow to his bow.

"Hold there," said Goodfellow, "I come in peace." He was a tall, sallow specimen with a glittering eye. He took a step toward the leader and doffed his brown cap.

"A college man," said the leader with a sigh. "What's your game, stranger?"

"I came to see you, sir. Are you Robbing Hood?"

"Yes, of course. Who else? Your purse please." Hood held out his hand.

John Goodfellow smiled. "I've a proposition for you, Mr. Hood. I'm a publicity man . . ."

"Publicity!" growled a huge man at Hood's side. "That's the last thing we need. Hand over dat purse."

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"Yes indeed, the purse," Hood said. "We're crooks, you know."

"I dig," said Goodfellow. "Don't misunderstand me. You need the right *kind* of publicity — and that's where I come in. Suppose we shoot a few acorns into the trees and see where they land? My business survey shows that you have a problem."

"Quite," said Robbing. "Our main problem is staying out of gaol."

"Also," said Little John, the large fellow, "eatin' regular."

"Exactly," agreed John Goodfellow, beaming at them. "And what do you do about it? You go out and rob people — right? That gets you a bad name."

"All crooks have bad names, lout!" Large Little John looked down a long nose.

Goodfellow shrugged. "Not necessarily. I can fix it so hardly anyone will call you crooks — for a pittance."

Robbing was startled. "So that no one will call us crooks?" He came closer, narrowing his eyes. "You can fix it?"

"How much?" asked Little John, suspiciously.

Goodfellow consulted a bit of paper he took from his tunic. "One hundred pieces of silver per annum, and a lifetime pass through the forest."

Little John jumped into the air, shouting. "Who's the crook! You or us?"

"I have a plan," Goodfellow said, nervously. He could see the blokes fingering their bows.

"That's a lot of loot, Goodfellow," Robbing said, drawing a dirk and testing its edge. "Let's hear the plan."

"Well," Goodfellow said quickly, "the first thing I'd do is change your image: *Now* you're a crook and the people hate you. You must be made lovable."

Little John guffawed, to Robbing's annoyance. "That ain't going to be easy."

"Proceed onward," Robbing said, glowering at the large lout. "I believe I spot the direction of your drift. I'd be billed in all the shires as Robbing, the lovable thief?"

"Sheeesh!" said Little John.

"No." Goodfellow shook his dark head. "That's not quite what I had in mind."

"Robbing, the friendly brigand?"

"Close, but not on the shilling. You must become a living legend in your own time. People have got to have confidence in you."

Little John snorted. "Right now they know that if they come to the forest they're gonna get mugged. Ain't that confidence?"

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"The wrong kind. It's bad, very bad."

Robbing flicked the dirk at a tree trunk. "Really, old boy. How else are we going to glom their gold?"

"Aye," agreed the large man, "and we only shoot five out of seven."

"Excuse me," Goodfellow sighed. "You're old fashioned, and behind the times. Try this on your dulcimer. What if you only robbed *some* of the people? Then —"

"Some of them!?" shouted Little John. "Some of them! You want we should go on the dole?"

Robbing retrieved the dirk and began to hone it, motioning the glowering green clad lads to close in. "So far, Goodfellow," he said, "that's the worst argument I ever heard."

"You're fighting me," protested Goodfellow, "hear me out. What I'm trying to say is — what if you only robbed the rich?"

"Sheeeesh! That's what we try t'do now. Poor folks ain't got a farthing — not after taxes."

"Quite so," agreed Robbing. "We rob the rich by all means. As often as possible. Goodfellow, you are —"

"Wait a minute! Hear me out! I can arrange that the news is broadcast to all that you only rob the rich! Whan can you lose by that? You admit you couldn't live a fortnight on the poor — right?"

"Right," growled Little John. "It don't pay to knock 'em on the noggins."

"I haven't finished. We'll bill you as Robbing, the protector of the poor and downtrodden. It'll make you famous! Robbing, the friend of the poor."

"It'll make *us* poor," snarled Little John.

"Famous?" said Robbing. "It'll really make me famous?"

"Absolutely," Goodfellow said. He frowned. "That's not much of a name — Robbing. What if we call you Robin? Robin Hood?"

"Splendid," Robbing said, giggling. "The famous Robin Hood." He put the dirk away.

"Wait, there's more," Goodfellow said, motioning them to come closer. "We'll carry it a step farther. I'll spread it around that you rob from the rich and *give* to the poor."

"You're trying to ruin us!" screamed Little John.

"I don't much care for the sound of *that*," Robin said, looking askance.

"What could it cost?" said Goodfellow. "Besides, the poor folks would be your allies — think of it that way. They'd be allies and spies. The Sheriff couldn't move without you knowledge — they'd see to it."

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"Hmmmmm," said Robin.

"Every stew-bum in England would be on our doorstep," growled Little John. "We'd be running a bread line."

"Ugh," said Robin.

"You're not looking at the broad picture," Goodfellow pointed out. "With the 'rob from rich, give to poor' angle, you couldn't help becoming famous. No crook in history every thought up such a gimmick."

Robin brightened. "You're absolutely positive I'd be famous?"

"I guarantee it. It's surefire."

"But," whined Little John, "couldn't we keep some of the loot — maybe most of it?"

"Who keeps books?" Goodfellow nudged Little John and chuckled. "Feed the poor slobs — find 'em jobs . . . you know."

Robin clapped his hands. "And I'll be famous. We'll do it. It's a deal we accept." He shook hands with Goodfellow. "Little John, pass the word. Everyone must know."

"Excellent," Goodfellow said, unrolling a document and producing a quill. "Sign here."

JOHN GOODFELLOW TIED HIS MOUNT TO THE BATTERED hitchrack and went inside the largest shanty on the dusty street. In another moment he sat across a desk from the mayor.

"I just closed a deal with the former Robbing — now called Robin Hood," he said. He displayed the contract for the mayor's fascinated eyes.

The mayor was a rough-hewn, fat man. "He won't steal our pigs and sheep anymore?"

"Pish, never," Goodfellow said, pointing out the correct clause on the foolscap. "He's agreed not to steal anything in town or from the poor. As of yesterday Robin Hood steals only from the rich and *gives* to the poor!"

The mayor's eyes grew round. He read the words again, moving his lips. "The poor. That's us."

"Robin Hood is a saint — the paper says so." Goodfellow put on his spectacles. "Only politicians would steal — oh, pardon me, Your Honor. Only bums would steal from the poor." He ran his finger down a list of towns. "This is the village of Glenville. Now, for protection from bandits, your fee is fifty pieces of silver per annum. Have you got the money?"

The mayor nodded and opened the desk drawer. ●

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Conan Doyle was insistent. Holmes was adamant. Dr. Watson was befuddled. H.G. Wells was to blame, as well as modern publishers for whom nothing is too sacred, not even the reputation of the world's greatest detective!

Sherlock Holmes & The Obligatory Love Scene

by LEE DUIGON

FROM THE DIARIES OF DR. JOHN H. WATSON, M.D.:

"Excuse me, Holmes, but it's almost time for your obligatory love scene."

In all my years with Sherlock Holmes, I never saw such a look of withering contempt as that which he turned upon our distinguished author, Mr. Conan Doyle.

"You know, Doyle," he said, his voice dripping with venom, "I think you enjoy this."

"Holmes, Holmes, how many times must I explain to you it's not my fault? If you must place blame, place it where it belongs — on the shoulders of the blockhead H.G. Wells and his confounded time machine!"

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"He's right, my dear fellow," I agreed. "It was all very well for Wells to shoot us a century into the future, but he should have had the decency to tell us how to return."

Holmes snorted and went back to examining a charred pipe dottle that had been left at the scene of the murder.

"I'm too busy," he said.

"I'm sorry," Doyle replied, "but this comes first."

Holmes slapped the table with his palm, overturning a bottle of Perrier water.

"If I had spent my time in the Hound of the Baskervilles case," he sneered, "dallying with wenches like a cockney carter, it is very likely Dr. Watson would not be alive today. And you, Doyle would be reduced to ghost writing!"

Doyle gently shook his head.

"Have a little respect for your creator, Holmes," he remonstrated. "Have I ever let you down?"

"You let Professor Moriarity escape from my clutches more than once," Holmes reminded him, "and at this rate, he's more than likely to escape again. You don't see him bedding some tart when the game's afoot!"

"You haven't read Chapter Four," Doyle said. "The professor, too, has his obligatory scene."

"Then I am ashamed for him," Holmes declared.

"I say, Doyle, does that mean I —"

"All in good time, Watson, all in good time!" he cut me off. "Despite the low standards of the current market, I try to preserve a modicum of good taste."

"With whom do you want Holmes to perform the scene?" I asked.

"Do you remember that topless go-go dancer in Chapter Two?"

"Oh, Lord!" Holmes groaned. "Doyle, have you lost your mind? He's mad, Watson — stark, staring mad!"

I had to admit I was surprised by Doyle's selection of a partner for my friend. I thought he should at least rate a university professor or a public official.

"She's a nice girl, Holmes," our author said.

"She's a bloody drab!" snarled Holmes. "Who did Moriarity get?"

"Miss Dalworthy, the luggage heiress."

"Dalworthy?" I cried. "Oh, damn!"

"I don't care if you offer me a Princess of the Blood!" Holmes growled. "See here, Doyle; a hundred years ago, you wouldn't allow me so much as a kiss from Irene Adler, a truly fascinating woman. You led me on and on, and nothing ever came of it. Now you want to pair

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me with a go-go dancer!

"By heaven, it is intolerable! I resign, Doyle. Find yourself another detective. Consult the TV Guide for inspiration."

"A hundred years ago was a hundred years ago," Doyle replied, as Holmes jammed his deerstalker cap onto his head. "Do you think I like larding my novels with these puerile scenes? Do you think I enjoy breaking up the narrative flow with sordid little bedroom incidents?

"Times change, Holmes. This is 1982. No publisher will touch a book unless it includes raw sex. At least allow me to provide it with a certain literary grace."

"They're still buying the books you wrote a hundred years ago," Holmes pointed out.

"Only because they can't be changed. You can't write books like that anymore and hope to earn a living.

"Good heavens, Holmes," he added, "be thankful I didn't make you gay! That's what one publisher wanted."

"Gay?" Holmes cried. He had not yet picked up the slang of the times.

"He means a poof, old fellow," I whispered.

Holmes looked faintly seasick.

"I retire," he declared.

"I say, Doyle," I spoke up. "Is it necessary to hitch Holmes up with a go-go dancer? Obviously she doesn't appeal to him. Why don't you find him a more suitable companion? I'll be glad to take the dancer off your hands."

"Capital idea, Watson!" Doyle concurred. "Well, Holmes? In Chapter Eight you will meet a beautiful, cultured drama critic. If you agree to do the scene with her, I'll make the necessary revisions on the manuscript."

"There is no such thing as a small loss of integrity," Holmes sniffed. "I will not cooperate in this sham."

"Very well," the author sighed. "Fortunately, Dr. Watson has accompanied you on enough adventures to gain some familiarity with your methods. I suppose I'll have to turn this case over to him."

Despite my friend's discomfiture, I could not suppress a thrill of pride. At last I would come into my own!

But Holmes turned beet-red, and almost hit the ceiling. "You'd turn my case over to this putterer!" he screamed. "How dare you! I won't have it!"

"You'll have to do the scene with the critic," Doyle reminded him.

"I'll do a scene with our landlady Mrs. Hudson before I let this clumsy dabbler muddle my methods!" roared Holmes. "Bring on your

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confounded drama critic!''

''Good show, old man!'' Doyle beamed ecstatically. ''It's all settled then. I knew I could count on you!''

And so I lost my moment of glory, but I hoped the incident was not without its compensations.

''I say, Doyle,'' I spoke up. ''I still get the go-go dancer, don't I?'' ●

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MIKE'S MAIL

WHERE THE GHOULS ARE

I just finished the October 1981 issue of MSMM and I would like to see more issues like it. More stories about ghouls and zombies and whatnot would be nice.

J.A. Frame
RD #1 Box 359
Glenmoore, PA 19343

I don't know about the ghouls and zombies, but we've got plenty of whatnot stories on hand. At least one of us better not forget that MSMM is basically a down to earth mystery magazine. An occasional touch of fantasy, horror, even the supernatural is okay, but I doubt that most of our readers would want a steady diet of it.

PULP AND MSMM

Recently there have been several letters in MSMM requesting more pulp related material. I think that the raders should know that MSMM is in reality a pulp magazine. Leo Margulies, founder of Renown Publications, was himself an old hand at publishing pulp magazines in the early 1930s and into the 1950s. He was Editorial Director for such giants as THE PHANTOM DETEC-

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TIVE, G-MEN DETECTIVE, THE MASKED DETECTIVE — the list goes on. When Leo founded Renown, be brought with him the knowledge he had obtained while associated with the above magazines. MSMM was a latter day pulp magazine of the 1950s, and continued the old tradition of those wonderful magazines. MSMM *is* pulp!

Brett Halliday began his writing career in the pulps. The character of Mike Shayne has its roots in pulpdom. What more could a pulp enthusiast ask for? Many of the writers in MSMM got their starts in the pulp magazines. The old saying "the old must make way for the new" is not totally true: MSMM has made way for the new, yet it still holds to those grand tradition which began in the early 1930s — the character, or superhero pulp magazines. MSMM remains the best magazine published today. If it goes, the pulp magazines will in truth be dead.

Like many readers, I too feel that Renown should use more of the pulp pieces by Mike Avallone and Frank Hamilton. They are great! If I may be so bold, Maybe I can get a plug in here for my own fan magazine, ECHOES, a pulp related fanzine. ECHOES contains art and articles on the pulp magazines, as well as book reviews and articles on present day paperback and magazine series. My number one artist is Frank Hamilton, and the articles are written by the experts in this field. Subscribers include many of the authors writing for MSMM: Mike Avallone, Dennis Lynds, Clayton Matthews, James Reasoner, and others. May I even go a step further and say that Brett Halliday even reads ECHOES. Anyone interested should write to me. And everyone should support MSMM. Keep up the good work!

Tom Johnson
Rt. 1 Box 169
Knox City, TX
79529

P.S. A bit of information pulp nostalgia buffs might be interested in: the May 1942 issue of DOUBLE-ACTION WESTERN featured the lead story "Two-Gun Rio Kid" by Don Davis. Don Davis was a pen name of Brett Halliday. The cover of the magazine featured a bar-room scene in which the Rio Kid stands with blazing six-guns in each hand — and lo and behold, wearing the garb of the Rio Kid is none other than Brett Halliday himself. The artist had used Mr. Halliday as his model when painting the cover!

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In case some of you missed any of the Avallone/Hamilton pulp revisited series: THE SHADOW appeared in the March 1981 MSMM; DOC SAVAGE in May 1981; THE SPIDER in June 1981; G-8 AND HIS BATTLE ACES in July 1981; OPERATOR #5 in August 1981; THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE in September 1981; and FU MANCHU in December 1981.

SHE LIKES SHORT-SHORTS

I have been a faithful *Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine* reader for over five years now and so I think it is about time to write my opinion of what I think of your magazine — it's just fantastic! I have acquired many favorite characters, namely: Patrick Scaffetti's Leo Reynolds and Faye; Mel D. Ames's Lieutenant Cathy Carruthers and Mark Swanson; and W.L. Fieldhouse's Major Lansing. I hope that all these characters continue their great mystery adventures.

I also hope that you continue printing short-short stories. I always scan the magazine first for the "shorties" before reading the not so "shorties." Whatever happened to the Mike Shayne cartoon? I miss it. I also noticed that the June 1982 cover is the same as the September 1977. Why?

Carol Lee
Address withheld
by request

Fred Fredericks, cartoonist of the Mike Shamus cartoon strip, got kind of busy with his regular chores of Mandrake the Magician, so we gave him some time off so he could catch up on that. It was a good feature, and thanks for reminding me to get in touch with him again about continuing it.

The three characters you mention are coming up in future issues; the stories are already in inventory.

As to the cover, well I hate to recycle a cover painting, but sometimes an artist commissioned to do the cover art just doesn't come through. In this particular instance, the artist was hurrying to our office in his Volkswagen, when a lovesick hippo, recently escaped from the zoo, tried to mate with it on the freeway. In the fracas, the painting was destroyed, making it necessary for us to ring in a last minute substitute. This, anyway, is the story the

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artist told us, and it's a well known fact that artists don't lie any more than do editors.

HE LIKES THEM LONG!

I have never written to a magazine before, but I am becoming upset with your magazine. I buy MSMM to read the Mike Shayne story, and lately they are running shorter and shorter. I can't find any paperback Mike Shayne stories anymore, so I rely on MSMM. To be honest I do enjoy some of the short stories and novelettes. Not all of them. I do not like macabre stories but enjoy the ones with a surprise ending like "A Matter of Memories" in the May 1982 issue. Otherwise your magazine is great. Just more of Mike, OK? I have been reading MSMM a long time.

Ernest E. Hammond, Sr.
85 Woodland Ave.
Binghamton, NY 13903

Some months ago there was a scheme afoot to produce an entirely new series of Mike Shayne paperback novels, but I don't know what happened to it. Possibly it's still germinating. If this comes through, it should make you happy.

As to the Shayne lead stories, there has been a slight drop in wordage. At first this was designed to permit more novelets and short stories in the magazine. With one huge story up front, there's not much room for other things. Actually, the right length for a story is the number of words it takes to tell it, and some of the slightly less longer tales have been nice and tight, whereas they might have seemed padded if they'd been longer. Turning out a Mike Shayne adventure each and every month is not just a typing exercise. It takes some thought and planning and a lot of wear and tear on the brain. Rather than conform rigidly to a set number of pages, we're letting Brett Halliday tell it in whatever length he feels will do the job.

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He couldn't believe what was happening. He'd been on his way to the state penitentiary — and suddenly he'd been rescued and was on his way to freedom! Who said crime didn't pay?

Rendezvous

by JOHN M. HEBERT

REED CUMMINGS SETTLED HIMSELF INTO THE BACK SEAT AS best as he could, considering the heavy leather belt around his waist to which his handcuffs were attached. He was wearing standard denim trousers, a worn gray sweatshirt and a denim jacket, just the attire for a man on his way to the state penitentiary in Deer Lodge. His usually carefully combed brown hair was a mess, partly from the hot July wind, but mostly from six weeks in the Bowden County Jail.

The deputy, a large, florid and sweating man named George Marshall, plumped his body onto the front seat, pushed the electric door locks and pulled onto Highway 200, heading west. When they got out of town he took off his brown Smokey the Bear hat and wiped his forehead with a large sweat-stained red handkerchief. He looked in the rearview mirror at Reed and said smugly, "They treat guys like you special at Deer Lodge, Cummings. The cons don't like *your kind* any better than the guards do." He grinned.

"I been in worse places," Reed muttered, "Like that rat-trap jail of yours." He looked sourly at the steel mesh screen between the front and back seats. Not much chance of getting at the deputy through that, he thought; a chance might come later.

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The heat was miserable as the burned landscape whipped by. Naturally Bowden County didn't see any use for air conditioners in the sheriff's cars, seeing as summer only lasts a couple of months in Montana. Reed chainsmoked and looked at ranch houses, rusty wire fences and telephone poles. After that first "conversation" neither man spoke.

THE DEPUTY STOPPED AT A SMALL RESTAURANT NEAR THE west edge of Winnett. The car left tracks in the shimmering soft asphalt. "Okay, Cummings, time for lunch," he said, opening the right rear door. "Don't try anything funny. I don't miss." He tapped the long-barreled Smith and Wesson revolver on his right hip.

Reed got out stiffly, his leg muscles aching. Even the back seat of a large car gets cramped when you're six feet two inches tall. They walked into the restaurant together, the deputy holding the screen door open for Reed. The few customers stared, then went back to their meals. The waitress, a bleached blonde in a faded green slack-suit, slopped the water when she came over to the booth they'd chosen in the corner. Reed looked at the menu, which consisted of two mimeographed pages with purple printing. The daily special was pork chops. "I'm not hungry," Reed murmured without looking up. "Could I just have a Coke?"

"Large or small?" the waitress said, her voice rising.

"Large, please."

"Gimmee a bowl of chili and a large Coke, too, Ma'm," the deputy said. The waitress scurried off. "Happens a lot, waitresses acting like that when I'm escorting a prisoner. Wonder what she'd say if I told her you're . . . ."

"Please," Reed said, lifting his brown eyes for the first time in five minutes, "she's nervous enough." The deputy laughed grimly.

The three customers left within five minutes, all of them looking back at the corner booth on their way out. Reed wished he had the menu to look at again. An old man dressed in faded jeans, a black and red plaid shirt and a sun-scorched cowboy hat came in and sat at the counter. He turned his wind-whipped face once toward the booth, then asked for a refill for his thermos. Reed saw him pull out of the parking lot a few minutes later, driving a battered blue pickup.

"Ah, that was good," the deputy said, wiping his lips. "Sure you don't want anything? A long way to supper."

"No, thanks." Reed answered. He finished drinking the Coke through a straw. "Can I go to the John now, before we leave?" His mind was racing with possibilities.

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The deputy stood just outside the bathroom door. The bathroom had no windows and Reed had a feeling that the deputy knew that all along.

THEY PICKED UP US 87 JUST NORTH OF GRASSRANGE. "IF IT means anything to you, Cummings, we're gonna take 191 to Interstate 90; then it's good highway all the way to Deer Lodge, your new home."

"Take your time," Reed said bitterly. "I've got lots of it." I sure as hell do, he thought, twenty years.

Fifteen miles later the deputy braked, then stopped on the road's dusty shoulder. A blue pickup with its hood up was sitting there, a white handkerchief hanging from the left door handle.

"What's the matter, old timer?" the deputy said, lumbering toward the old man Reed had seen in the restaurant.

"Damn thing just up and quit on me. Got plenty of gas," the old man answered, taking off his hat to wipe his forehead on the inside of his raised right arm.

"Lemme see," the deputy said, peering under the hood. "Sometimes the coil wire comes loose in these old . . ."

Reed gasped as the old man produced a black sock stuffed with something and hit the deputy expertly behind the right ear with it. The deputy collapsed like a two-hundred pound sack of beans.

"Hey!" Reed shouted, sticking his head out the window. "What's going on?"

"You Tom Miller? Mister Thompson told me to fetch you outta the law's hands." The old man was dragging the deputy toward an outcropping of rock and dried brush.

"Um, sure I am. Mr. Thompson sent you, huh?"

"Sure did. He can't see nobody goin' to jail for not payin' his property taxes. Come on, get in the truck. Haven't got all day." The old man flicked the door lock, then walked around and opened the rear door. Reed climbed out gratefully, not bothering to notice any new stiffness.

"I'd shake hands, except you're sorta, well, you know," the old man said, looking somewhere over Reed's left shoulder. "My name's Ben."

"Hi, Ben," Reed grinned. "I'm . . . Tom Miller. Sure am glad to see you. Can you get me outta this hardware?" He jingled his handcuffs against the steel ring on the belt.

"Nope. The deputy don't carry the key. Rules. We hafta saw you outta there when we get to Mr. Thompson. Come on!!"

THE PICKUP RAN LIKE AN OLD SWISS WATCH. BEN SWUNG IT

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around and headed back east. He drove with his left hand, the tanned right hand lying loosely on a jar of honey. A loaf of bread lay next to it on the cracked seat cushions.

"Want some bread'n honey? Good for ya."

"No thanks, Ben. I'm too excited to eat now," Reed answered. I've got to cook up a good story before we get to this Thompson guy's place, he thought. He'll know right away I'm not Tom Miller, but maybe I can sell him a line about me evading taxes or something. Once I get these damn handcuffs off, or away from this old fool Thompson sent . . .

The truck swung right, onto a dirt road. Reed looked through the back window, but all he could see was the brown dust boiling behind. It was a rough road. Reed jounced around inside the cab, his "hardware" keeping him from getting a good grip on anything. They stopped in about ten minutes, in a clearing amidst scrub pine trees and dried-out grass.

"Where are we?" Reed asked, looking around him. An old abandoned building leaned against a tree to the right. To the left, a pile of dirt. Straight ahead, the road disappeared around a hill.

"Well, here we are," Ben said. He stopped the engine and got out, flicking the settling dust with his hat.

"I asked where we are," Reed repeated angrily. "Is this where we meet Thompson?"

"Sure is," Ben answered as he opened the passenger door. Reed swiveled in the seat and jumped to the ground. "Take it easy, son. We got twenty minutes 'til he gets here."

Reed wandered around the clearing while Ben rummaged in the junk in the back of the truck. Rough country, he thought; be tough to walk out of here with the handcuffs still on.

"Meet Mister Thompson," a voice said firmly behind Reed. He turned. Ben was standing ten feet away, a shovel leaning against one hip, the jar of honey tucked under one arm. The other arm held a submachinegun which was pointed directly at Reed. "This, Mister *Cummings,*" Ben continued, "is what is known as a war souvenir. Highly illegal of course, but Mr. Thompson has his uses at times."

"But Miller . . ." Reed sputtered, backing up and edging around the hole next to the dirt pile.

"There is no Miller," Ben grated. "Just you and me. You see, I consider twenty years incarceration insufficient for what you did, especially for a repeater sex offender. Cindy was my granddaughter." He gestured with the submachinegun, toward the hole. "Let's not waste any more time, Mr. Cummings. The ants are waiting." ●

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Stiff Competition

BOOK REVIEWS

by JOHN BALL

Peter Way starts us off this month with *Belshazzar's Feast,* a story that combines police procedure with espionage. England is about to join OPEC and, as might be expected, there is opposition to the move. A group of terrorists devise a plan to systematically poison the food in England until the pro-OPEC faction fives up. There is a good deal of action, all of which leads to a grand banquet at Buckingham Palace where some of the food is suspect. The police anti-terrorist squad is lead by a fanatic, which creates additional problems. Her Majesty the Queen may not be amused by the wild scenes at the palace, but most readers will find them highly entertaining. You'll get your money's worth out of this one. (Atheneum, $13.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

Those two gifted ladies who are Emma Lathen are with us again in *Green Grow the Dollars,* one of the best books they have given us in some time. A long-established seed company, whose annual catalog mailing is waited for by millions, has developed a sensational new tomato plant that will yield during most of the year, even in severe climates. Just before the catalog is mailed, announcing this epic discovery, a small seed company in Wisconsin enters suit claiming that the tomato is theirs and gets an injunction aganst the mailing of the catalog. Add the fact that the old established company has just been bought out by a conglomerate and you have the corporate mess, plus a murder, that banker John Putnam Thatcher is called upon to unsnarl. The writing is sharper and more brittle than usual from these authors,

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plus which much of the dialogue is unusually tart. If they softened a little in the preceding *Going for the Gold,* they are right back in form here. Emma Lathen is an institution in the mystery genre, and deservedly so. (Simon and Schuster, $13.50)

☆ ☆ ☆

Robert Barnard has been rapidly building a reputation in crime writing, notably with his *Death in a Cold Climate.* Now we have a new book, and a wildly improbable one called *Death by Sheer Torture.* The title is accurate: one member of a family of British aristocrats who would be right at home in a Marx Brothers movie amuses himself by having copies of ancient torture devices built and then trying them out — on himself. While playing around with a strappado, a horrible arm dislocating device, he meets his end, an event subsequently determined to have been murder. A rational member of the family (there is one) is a police detective who, against his wishes, it sent down to look into the matter. The chaos that results may delight some and upset others, depending on individual reactions to the kind of kinkiness and tortures put on display. We liked the author's other books somewhat more. (Scribners, $10.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

C.P. Snow's hardy perennial, *Death Under Sail* is back once more, this time in a quality paperback edition. It is one of the standards which has been chosen time and again for inclusion in series of notable mysteries (the Avon Crime Classics, for example). (Scribners, $5.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

Ben Healey has a new offering called *Midnight Ferry to Venice.* A portrait painter of good reputation has been engaged to immortalize an ancient dowager on canvas. Shortly he becomes involved with a scheme to steal some newly-discovered da Vinci cartoons (preliminary sketches) which would be virtually priceless. There is a heroine and lots of canals, but the book does not rise very far above the level of a workmanlike job. (Walker, $10.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

Ken Follett is best known for his Edgar-winning *The Eye of the Needle.* He has just appeared with a new book called *The Man From*

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St. Petersburg. The plot is quite a neat one, and different. Just before World War I a Russian anarchist is determined to kill a noble young envoy to England from the Czar. A glacial British diplomat is called upon to represent his country in the negotiations. His wife is Russian, and the former lover of the anarchist, which complicates things nicely. Winston Churchill plays one of the major roles in the story. It is all worked out with great care, but at a very slow pace so that it seems to take forever for the major events to arrive on stage. There are some good descriptions of the role of women in this society, particularly an engaging eighteen year old, but we wish that Mr. Follett had been a bit brisker in the telling of his tale. (Morrow, $14.50)

☆ ☆ ☆

Charlotte MacLeod makes a valiant effort to be both cute and clever in her new book *Wrack and Rune,* but the result is not up to her standard. Many of her people have very unfamiliar and closely similar names, making it almost impossible to keep them sorted out. What results is a rather wild mess in Lumpkin Corners, Massachusetts, climaxed when a local TV reporter appears with a newscast on channel 2½. We would rather not comment further. (Doubleday Crime Club, $10.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

For your classical mystery read this month it is a pleasure to recommend *The Dead of Jericho* by Colin Dexter. The scene is England, but the plot is borrowed, and very ingeniously, from a classic Greek tragedy. In it s new garb the old story appears as a murder mystery cum police procedural, and a very good one. The cast gets a little confusing at times, but otherwise this is a superior job in every way with a very clever solution. In addition to the top grade plotting, all of the clues are fairly given. Detective Chief Inspector Morse does his stuff in fine style, and in a very human way. (St. Martins, $9.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

Fans of John D. MacDonald will not want to miss David Geherin's book about him called, simply *John D. MacDonald.* There is a good deal about Travis McGee, of course, and on the cover of at least the paperback edition, there is a fascinating glimpse of *The Busted Flush,* (his celebrated houseboat). This is one of the publisher's Recognition Series. (Frederick Unger, $11.95 in hardcover, $6.95 in paperback)

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☆ ☆ ☆

PAPERBACK NOTES: From here on in we can expect a steady series of reprints of Rex Stout's books; currently we have *Bad for Business,* a pre-Nero Wolfe work from Bantam, $2.50 . . . A genuine classic is Arthur Upfield's *Death of a Swagman* with the incomparable Inspector Napoleon Bonaparte, Scribners, $2.95 . . . Catherine Aird is back (with Constable Crosby) in *Slight Mourning.* Don't miss her, she's a delight. Bantam, $2.25 . . . Two of Henry Wade's famous works are back via the Perennial Library: *The Hanging Captain* and *A Dying Fall;* fine entertainment for $2.50 each . . . Vanishing children is the theme of Lindsay Moracotta's *Hide and Seek* a suspense/terror original from Pocket Books $2.95 . . . Penguin gives us two modern works that were very well like in hardback, Bartholomew Gill's *McGarr and the Politician's Wife* and Jonathan Gash's *Spent Game,* which is all abut antiques, of course. They're yours for $2.95 each. Gash, in particular, is most entertaining, and the antique trade is mercilessly revealed. ●

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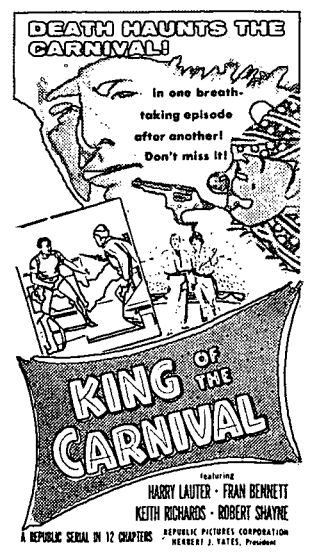
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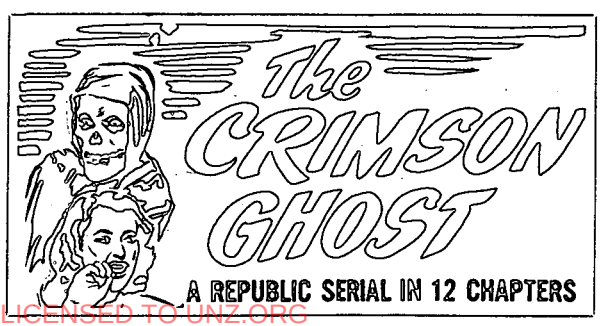

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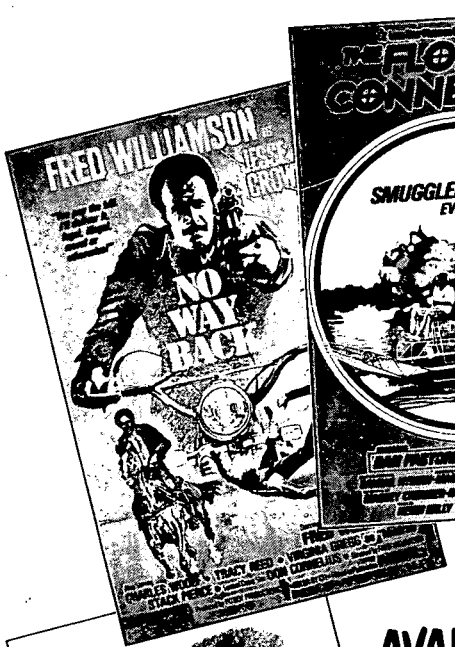

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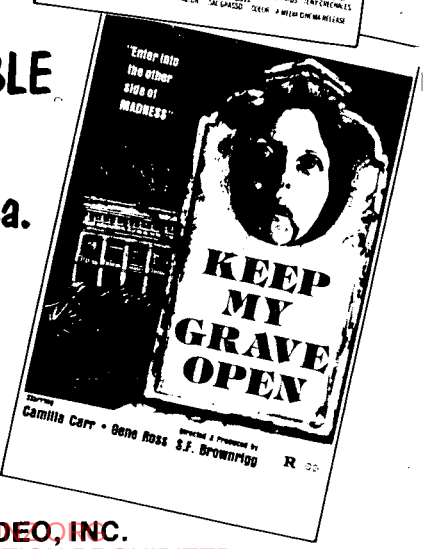

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